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THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION
ROYAL FUSILIERS
1914-1919

MILITARY HISTORIES BY
THE SAME AUTHOR

THE 2ND DIVISION, 1914-1918.
THE 62ND DIVISION, 1914-1919.
THE WEST YORKSHIRE REGT. IN
THE WAR, 1914-1918.
THE EAST YORKSHIRE REGT. IN
THE GREAT WAR, 1914-1918.
THE SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY,
1914-1919.
THE KING'S REGIMENT, 1914-
1919.
THE DIE-HARDS IN THE GREAT
WAR.

Shortly :

THE 19TH DIVISION, 1914-1919.
THE DUKE OF CORNWALL'S LIGHT
INFANTRY, 1914-1919.
THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE REGI-
MENT, 1914-1918.
THE LINCOLNSHIRE REGIMENT,
1914-1918.

THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION
ROYAL FUSILIERS
1914-1919

BY
EVERARD WYRALL

WITH A FOREWORD
BY
MAJOR-GENERAL SIR C. E. PEREIRA
K.C.B., C.M.G.



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FOREWORD

IT was a most interesting experience for a regular officer to see the wonderful *esprit de corps* of the new army battalions. I don't know any battalion where this spirit was more marked than in the 17th Battalion Royal Fusiliers; it was so strong that it has survived and is vigorous to this day, as their Old Comrades Association shows.

I had the honour to command the 2nd Division from December, 1916, until the division was broken up on the Rhine in March, 1919, the 17th Royal Fusiliers being transferred to one of the divisions newly formed for the occupation of the Rhine. During this time I had excellent opportunities of judging the fine sterling qualities of this Battalion.

Their organization and administration were excellent, but it was as a fighting battalion that they made their mark; during the time that I commanded the division there was no important operation in which we were engaged that the work of the 17th Battalion was not outstanding.

The Battalion was exceptionally favoured in having a commanding officer who had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order three times and the Military Cross; I refer to Brigadier-General Weston. A fighting battalion led by

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a fighting commanding officer is bound to have a wonderful record of service.

Brigadier-General C. G. Higgins, and Lieut.-Colonels Grant and Smith, were also enthusiastic Commanding Officers whose influence helped to make the 17th Royal Fusiliers into a first-class fighting unit.

Of the many great fights of the Battalion I select the most spectacular when the German counter-attack broke on the northern side of the Cambrai salient on the 30th November, 1917, on the front held by the 2nd Division. The 17th held a trench running at right angles to the general line. They received orders to withdraw from the dangerously exposed line and organize a new position conforming to the general front. The tale of the gallantry of their rearguard under Captain Stone and Lieutenant Benzecry which inflicted heavy losses on the enemy with bullet, bomb, and bayonet, sacrificing themselves and thereby gaining invaluable time for the remainder of the Battalion to consolidate their new position, is one of the finest actions related of any battalion in the war.

It is indeed a matter of congratulation to the Battalion that their gallant deeds have been worthily told by Mr. Everard Wyrall, an old acquaintance of the 2nd Division whose war history he wrote soon after the Armistice.

CECIL PEREIRA

Major-General

October, 1930

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MAP

BOURLON WOOD: THE GREAT FIGHT, 30TH NOVEMBER,
1917 facing p. 186

CHAPTER I

THE CALL TO ARMS

AT the lower end, and on the left-hand side of St. James's Street, not far from St. James's Palace, there is a small courtyard in which the 'gallants' of a century or more ago were wont to settle their disputes with the sword; in those days a quiet spot and off the main thoroughfare. It was called then, as it is now, Pickering Court. Here, in one of the buildings in the courtyard, the 11th (Empire Battalion) Royal Fusiliers came to life late in August, 1914, the exact date is uncertain.

At first it was rumoured that the Battalion was to be a resuscitated Imperial Light Horse of South African War fame, but the rumour died and the Fusiliers were born.

On the 21st of August orders had been issued by the Government for the raising of the First New Army of six divisions, subsequently known as 'K.1'; on the 11th of September the formation of a Second New Army of six divisions was ordered, and a Third New Army, of a

similar number of divisions, was ordered two days later.

The rush to 'join up' was immediate. Even those who were most optimistic in their belief that the manhood of the country had only to be asked, were amazed at the wonderful response to the call issued by Lord Kitchener (then Secretary of State for War). From England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, from the far corners of the earth, wherever the British Flag waved, men flocked to the recruiting offices.

Pickering Court was a busy place. All day long men were being first medically examined and, if passed by the doctor, enrolled.

'The men', said Captain J. C. Murgatroyd in his notes on those early days of the 17th Royal Fusiliers, 'were a splendid lot and keen as mustard, being drawn chiefly from West End banks, the Stock Exchange, Insurance offices and the theatrical world, with a sprinkling of old Imperial Light Horse of South African fame.'

On the 12th of September (a Saturday) the Battalion paraded for the first time as a unit in the Green Park, and was formed up into four-squad parties representing four companies. There was only one man in uniform among them—Sergeant-Major J. O. Murgatroyd¹—who also was the only one possessing a knowledge and

¹ Later Captain J. O. Murgatroyd.

experience of the (then) new double-company drill. Taking each party in turn, he instructed them in 'forming fours', with the result that in some sort of military formation the Battalion was enabled to march to Victoria Station and there entrain for Warlingham, Surrey.

While the Battalion was entraining, a pantech-nicon which contained the men's 'kit' (each man was allowed a small parcel containing one change of underclothing) was also loaded on the train.

On arrival at Upper Warlingham Station, the Fusiliers were met by the village band which led the way to Court Farm—the destination of the Battalion.¹

An advanced party had left London on the previous Wednesday for the purpose of erecting tents which, however, were pitched on ground thick in long grass; also the accommodation was inadequate, for D Company (being the last to arrive) found itself without a single tent. But under the direction of Regimental Sergeant-Major Knight, V.C., more tents were being put up when a thunderstorm broke over the camp and soon the grass was drenched. With no blankets or ground sheets the outlook for the night was poor until, at about 1 a.m., Quartermaster-Sergeant Willard arrived with a supply which had been spontaneously and generously

¹ At Warlingham the number of the Battalion was changed from '11th' to '17th'.

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supplied by the inhabitants of the surrounding villages.

The next day—Sunday—a route-march enabled the Battalion to stretch its legs and also see something of the vicinity of Court Farm. But at first things were naturally chaotic. To begin with, there was only one water tap in the camp, and as for equipment, uniforms and arms—they simply did not exist, not for the Fusiliers at that period. For the time being, therefore, Swedish exercises, lectures and route-marches constituted the only training possible.

On settling down at Court Farm, however, Sergeant-Major Murgatroyd organized classes of instruction, brought up over one hundred reservists from the National Reserve Battalion—all old soldiers, many of whom were qualified instructors and army cooks—and with these as a nucleus, N.C.O.'s were quickly appointed to the companies.

For over two months the Battalion was without rifles and used wooden models. Then a few old-pattern rifles were issued—one to every six men. The O.C., 4th Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment at Croydon, gave permission for the Fusiliers to use the miniature rifle range, and, with some miniature rifles from Sergeant-Major Murgatroyd's National Reserve Battalion, preliminary instruction in musketry began.

Before the end of the year blue uniforms and

forage caps were issued and greatly loathed! They formed the fatigue dress of peace time and were called 'Barnardo Boys' Kit'.

Summer gave place to autumn and autumn to winter, and just as surely the Fusiliers were learning their new job as soldiers.

Came Christmas and then the spring of 1915, and gradually the Battalion was assuming a vastly different appearance. Discipline, drill and good comradeship had worked wonders, and that friendly spirit of rivalry between companies, which has always been so beneficial a feature in the life of the Regular Army, had produced that strong feeling of *esprit de corps* which ever after animated the 17th Royal Fusiliers.

Four companies (A, B, C and D) had been formed from the first day of arrival in camp, the men joining whichever company took their fancy until it became necessary to level up the numbers according to 'Army Establishments'. A good many men, however, left to take commissions in other units and a fifth company—E—was formed, many of the recruits being miners from Derbyshire—splendid fellows for the most part and hard workers.

Huts had taken the place of tents, the former being situated on the top of the hill running up from Whytleafe; at this time B Company was billeted in the village of Warlingham.

In the spring of 1915 Colonel Grant was in

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command, Major C. Walker Leigh second-in-command and Captain Cronbach, Adjutant: A Company was commanded by Major R. Turner, B by Captain A. E. Winnington-Barnes, C by Captain Leslie Melville and D by Captain Osborne.

Of the Colonel it was said that he had an extraordinary keen eye. When the Battalion was drawn up on parade the slightest movement attracted his attention. He would yell out, 'Stand still! No. — in the rear rank of — Company. Stand still, I can see you, sir!'

Near to the camp, the Guards from Caterham Barracks were frequently drilled, and the Fusiliers were often marched to the ground to see the Guardsmen. Invariably Major Turner would draw attention to their smart movements:

'Look at that! It's only a little thing, but—by God!'

There was plenty of sport and amusement in camp, and even on route-marches halts would be enlivened by boxing bouts.

On one occasion a very beefy Fusilier, who obviously knew nothing about the 'gentle art', when asked by his officer after a particularly gruelling round how he felt, replied:

'I like it, I like it, *but I can't see, sir!*'

The Battalion was frequently engaged in digging trenches at Botley Hill for the first defence line of London, but in June, 1915, the Fusiliers,

with many heart-pangs, left Warlingham for Clipstone, in the Dukeries district, Nottinghamshire. Life at Court Farm had been made pleasant by many kindly people in the neighbourhood, who arranged concerts, gave tea parties, and in other ways did all that was possible to make 'off-duty' time happy for every one: to the survivors of the original Battalion those early days at Warlingham are among their unperishable memories.

Clipstone Camp was near Mansfield, and on arrival the first task allotted the Fusiliers was the making of a parade ground and a high earth and sod wall in front of it. Training now became intensive: men who were over age—who with intense enthusiasm had joined up on the formation of the Battalion, but were obviously unfit to go through the final hard training—and those who were inefficient were ruthlessly weeded out.

Every one was by now clothed in khaki and the Battalion on parade presented a very smart appearance.

The camp was hutted, and there was keen competition in the laying out of little gardens outside the huts. Some of the huts boasted pianos (hired from Nottingham or Mansfield), and the inmates held At Home evenings at which light refreshments would be served to the tune of lively music.

The Battalion Band had been formed in the

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early days and eventually became first class. 'The Drums' were also excellent. Both Transport and Water Sections were formed at Clipstone, the former under 2nd Lieut. Stanley Wootton and the latter under Lance-Corporal Ward-Fox.

At Clipstone also the Battalion, under the supervision of Private Trotter of A Company (whose work was commended in Brigade orders), built rifle ranges which throughout the War were used by various units.

In August another (and final) move took place to Tidworth, Salisbury Plain, where the Fusiliers were quartered in Bhurtpore Barracks.

Training took the form of field operations: musketry was completed at Bulford, and for the first time the Battalion took part in divisional operations, including 'night-ops'.

The 17th Royal Fusiliers now formed part of the 99th Infantry Brigade, 33rd Division, other units of the Brigade being the 22nd, 23rd and 24th Royal Fusiliers.

About three months were spent on Salisbury Plain in hard training: months full of rumours none of which seemed to materialize. But at last there came a day when H.M. the Queen visited Tidworth and inspected the 33rd Division on parade. Then, at midnight on the 12th/13th of November, the advanced guard of the Battalion paraded, under Lieut. J. A. Bott, including

the transport section, left barracks at 1.30 a.m. and entrained for Southampton. On the 15th the main body of the Battalion paraded at 5.30 a.m., and, after a short service, marched through Tidworth to the station. The people at the windows of houses called out their farewells and wished the Fusiliers 'good luck'.

Of the officers about eighty per cent of the subalterns had enlisted in the ranks of the Battalion.

The train crawled to Folkestone, and on a calm sea the 17th set out on their Great Adventure. The things which they had tried to visualize were soon to become realities—not quite, perhaps, as their fancy pictured—for no man was ever able to realize what war meant until he came face to face with death and destruction and all the horrors of trench life. In those moments the things which he had dreamed of in England were as naught.

CHAPTER II

IN THE LINE: NOVEMBER, 1915-JULY, 1916

THE Battalion arrived at Boulogne at about 3 p.m., Wednesday, 17th November, 1915. Disembarkation began immediately, and soon the 17th were swinging along the road to Ostrohave Rest Camp where they were accommodated in tents. In this not very delectable spot the Fusiliers remained until mid-day on the 18th of November when they entrained at Pont des Bricq station, first picking up the Battalion Transport, who had arrived via Southampton-Havre. Steenbecque was their destination, and on arrival at 7.30 p.m. they marched to billets at Grand Hasard (Morbecque Nord).

The strength of the Battalion at this period was 31 officers and 994 other ranks.

Three days were spent in billets during which (on the 21st) the 17th were inspected by General Gough (G.O.C., II. Corps, First Army). On the 22nd they marched to Thiennes, on the 23rd to Busnes (the Battalion's first pay-day in France)

and on the 25th Annezin, near Bethune, arriving at about 12.15 p.m. At Annezin the Fusiliers first saw troops going up to and coming out of the front line.

At this period—November, 1915—the British Army in France and Flanders was being reorganized. The arrival of the New Army divisions had already begun, and, in order to stiffen their ranks and also train them for the hard life before them, brigades and even battalions were transferred to regular divisions of the Old Army, the survivors of which had by now become seasoned campaigners, brigades and battalions of the Old Army being similarly posted to New Army divisions. Thus, on the day the 17th Royal Fusiliers arrived at Annezin, the 99th Brigade was transferred to the 2nd Division,¹ while the 19th Brigade of the latter was transferred to the 33rd Division. The bandsmen belonging to the 17th, however (to the disappointment of the Battalion), remained with the latter division, and it was poor comfort that the Fusiliers were allowed to keep the band instruments.

Three days were allowed the Battalion in which to settle down in the Divisional area, and then on the 28th at 6 a.m. the Fusiliers marched to Le Preol where they were attached to the 5th Infantry Brigade for instruction in trench war-

¹ The 17th Royal Fusiliers were still in the First Army but belonged now to the I. Corps.

fare. It was here that Major Turner (second in command) made a level bet of £25 (taken in the Officers' Mess) that the Battalion would suffer no casualties in this village; he won!

The first parties for the front line—four officers and eight N.C.O.'s each from A and B Companies with the Lewis Gun Officer, Captain Bott—went that day into the trenches held by the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and 1st Queen's respectively, while the remainder of the Battalion, billeted in Le Preol, were under instruction from officers and N.C.O.'s of the Highland Light Infantry. The following day the two parties from A and B Companies returned to billets, their places in the front line being taken by similar parties from C and D Companies. The Transport Officer, Lieut. Stanley Wootton, half the machine gunners and half the Battalion signallers also went into the front line on this date. On the 30th, A Company, as a whole, went into the trenches of the 2nd Oxford and Bucks for a twenty-four-hour tour, B Company similarly being attached to the 2nd Highland Light Infantry.

In Bethune, the Fusiliers had their first baths.

The particular sector in which the 17th Royal Fusiliers began their novitiate in trench warfare lay immediately south of the La Bassee Canal and between the latter and the Cambrin—La Bassee road—it was known as the Cuinchy sector, the

ruins of that village occupying an almost central spot in the Brigade area.

It was just as well perhaps that the Battalion should early be brought face to face with the worst possible conditions in the trenches, for the Cuinchy sector in November, 1915, was one of the worst sectors in France or Flanders. The 2nd Division had held this sector of the front line (with others on the immediate right and left of it) from early in the year, and, although much work had been done on the trenches and communications, nothing could prevent the damage caused by rain, frost and thaws. In the front line, water and mud—anything from waist to knee-deep—produced a condition almost indescribable. The hours men passed crouching against the ‘walls’ of the trenches (for to show one’s head above the parapet meant almost certain death from a sniper’s bullet) were passed in dull agony. Between the two lines of opposing trenches No Man’s Land was a dreadful place—a gloomy stretch of shell-holes and mine craters which frequently overlapped one another, mostly full of stinking water, foul from decaying bodies which still lay beneath the turgid surface. Few sections of the line could show craters in such horrible profusion as those in which the Fusiliers had come to serve their apprenticeship. Two months previously, during the Battle of Loos, the presence of these shell-holes and deep

gashes in No Man's Land had (as well as the gas failure) broken up the attack of 2nd Division troops against the enemy's line; for only narrow paths existed between the craters, and these were all marked down by the enemy's machine gunners and riflemen. Both sides made use of the canal banks for observation purposes and sniping, while a number of brickstacks—half of which stood in our lines and the remainder in the German lines—also provided 'snipers' nests'; one of the first instructions the novice received in going into the front line was to 'keep your head down', for there was always an almost irresistible desire to take a peep over the parapet at No Man's Land to 'see what it was like'.

No one ever forgets the first sector in which he served in France or Flanders, and memories of the Cuinchy sector will be recalled to survivors of the 17th Royal Fusiliers by such names of trenches (named mostly by the 4th Guards Brigade who held that part of the line frequently before they were transferred to the Guards Division in August, 1915) as Park Lane Redoubt, Bond Street, Oxford Street, Portland Road, etc., or a communication trench which some wag had named 'Lovers' Lane'.

On the 4th of December the Battalion moved to Annequin North for instruction in digging trenches: the billets there were shelled with shrapnel and one man (Corporal Slack) was

wounded in the leg—the first man wounded. On the 6th, 2nd Lieutenant A. P. Young and Lance-Sergeant A. Ogle of A Company were accidentally wounded while practising bomb-throwing. Such accidents were not uncommon in those early days when hand grenades were still somewhat primitive. Two machine gunners were killed in the trenches on the 7th—the first deaths recorded in the Battalion. The enemy's guns had been busy that day, and, although the M.G. Section had lost two men killed and one wounded (Privates Sim and Clarke) and a Vickers gun had been buried and some of their equipment destroyed, the remainder got out of the trenches and reached Annequin in safety.

From Annequin the Fusiliers moved to billets on Bethune on the 11th of December, and two days later they were definitely transferred from the 99th Brigade to the 5th Infantry Brigade, other units of which were the 2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, 2nd Highland Light Infantry, 1/9th Highland Light Infantry and 24th Royal Fusiliers. The next day the Battalion took over B1 sub-sector immediately north of the La Basse Canal. This was a quiet part of the line and the 17th were able to do much digging, clearing and draining the trenches which were in a poor condition. Relief came on the 20th, but, as luck would have it, the Fusiliers spent their first Christmas in France in the front

line, for on Christmas Eve they again took over the front line in B1 sub-sector. Here, on the 25th, Major C. G. Higgins (2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry) arrived and assumed command of the Battalion *vice* Lieut.-Colonel W. G. Grant who returned to England.

Although the 17th were in the front line on Christmas Day, *Daily Telegraph* plum puddings and an enormous mail from home helped out the rations and all ranks had a cheery time—the enemy probably being similarly engaged, for he showed no inclination to make things unpleasant.

The last day of the year found the Battalion billeted in Norrent-Fontes, for the 2nd Division was due to be relieved in the line. The relief was completed on the night of the 8th/9th of January and the Division moved back into G.H.Q. Reserve. At the end of the month, however, the Division again moved back into the front line, relieving the 12th Division in Sections B and C (Givenchy and Festubert).

On the 18th of January the 17th Royal Fusiliers left billets in Norrent-Fontes and marched to Lillers, entraining at the latter village for Bethune. On arrival at Bethune, the 5th Brigade being in Divisional Reserve, the Battalion moved to billets at Hingette. A change in billets (to Essars) took place on the 26th, otherwise little of importance happened until the 28th when the Battalion moved up to the support line, on this occasion

the 'Village Line' which ran from Festubert to L'EpINETTE. The 5th Brigade had relieved the 99th Brigade in C Sector, which ran from a point about one thousand yards north of Givenchy Church to the junction of La Quinque Rue and Rue du Marais roads.

On the 30th the Fusiliers took over C1 sub-sector from the 2nd Oxford and Bucks, the relief being completed after darkness had fallen. At this period the line was comparatively quiet. Shell-fire was slight, but machine gunning and sniping were more frequent. The trenches were muddy and water everywhere; the defences consisted mostly of sandbagged breastworks, the ground being too wet for digging, water being struck a few inches below surface even in those spots (few and far between) which appeared dry. Casualties were few.

The tour ended on the 3rd of February and the Battalion came out of the trenches covered from head to foot in mud, which took quite a day or two to remove. Back in the 'Village Line', large working parties were again supplied by the Fusiliers, for constant labour was necessary in order to keep the defences standing which, owing to the weather, were continually slithering down, if not blown down by hostile shell-fire.

The 8th of February again found the Fusiliers in the front-line trenches. Their diary states the Battalion occupied 'Islands', which accurately

describes the condition of the line. Their diary for this date is an excellent summary of trench warfare as then in vogue; it is worth recording for comparison with later periods:

'Our trench-mortar battery fired a large number of bombs to which the enemy replied with "whizz-bangs". No casualties. Enemy active with rifle grenades and trench mortars during the morning. Heavy shells heard going over in the direction of Le Touret. Patrol went out at midnight and examined enemy's wire for three hundred yards. Wire found to be very strong and thickly barbed. Weather fine.'

It sounds all very commonplace and matter-of-fact, but in reality trench warfare was anything but that. Men lived by comparison during the years of the War, and the absence of stirring incidents in the Battalion records does not mean that they never occurred, but only that *comparatively* in trench warfare there was less fighting and the situation is invariably written down as 'quiet'. But 'quietude' meant death all the same: an unlucky trench-mortar bomb would burst in a trench, a few rounds from a hostile machine gun on a working party out in front of the trenches at night, a patrol encounter in No Man's Land—and often, some little home in England, maybe a country cottage or a stately mansion, would be plunged into mourning.

The Fusiliers were relieved from their 'Islands' on the 11th of February and moved to billets in Les Choquaux where six days were spent. But

towards the end of the month the 2nd Division was transferred from the I. to the IV. Corps and took over the Angres-Calonne line from the 18th French Division. The 5th Brigade moved to the Petit Sains-Fosse 10 area on the 26th and 27th, and on the latter date the Fusiliers took over, after dark, the Etonnoir sector Calonne from the 7th French Hussars of the 18th French Division. The Battalion's trenches extended for about five hundred yards: they were an average distance of 150 yards from the enemy's front line. The enemy was reported 'quiet'. On the 2nd of March the Division extended its line, taking over a portion of the Souchez Front.

Then followed three more weeks of trench warfare during which casualties gradually increased. Although the records frequently give one the impression that the enemy was not very vigilant, a close watch was nevertheless kept on his movements. Behind the Souchez-Angres-Calonne sector lay the main ridge of the Notre Dame de Lorette Spur which the French had wrested from the Germans in 1915, after heavy fighting, and it was always considered that the enemy would make an attempt to regain this high ground which was of considerable tactical importance.

The first tour the Fusiliers spent in the front line in the new sector was short, for on the 1st of March they were back in billets at Coron D'Aix. The following night, however, they

relieved the 2nd Oxford and Bucks in the Calonne right sector, two companies and a platoon taking over the front line, the remaining companies and three platoons being in support. The enemy was very active with rifle grenades, and the first day in the line resulted in one man being killed and another wounded. The defences were not in good condition, for an immediate reconnaissance of the wire in front of the trenches proved it to be weak and too close to the parapet. Another man was wounded on the 5th. Snow fell on this day and the weather was bitterly cold. Further activity with rifle grenades signalized the enemy's activity on the 6th.

In the sector held by the Fusiliers was a sap—Solferino Sap by name—which seemed to have particular attraction for the Bosche; he was extraordinarily fond of keeping it under a shower of rifle grenades. In return the 17th usually gave him a dose of trench-mortar bombs.

On the 11th there was a gas alarm and every one donned their masks, but no developments followed. The next night a German working party was heard sapping opposite Solferino Sap, but a few rounds from Lewis guns stopped his labours. Two patrols were then sent out, but all they discovered was that the existence of a 'long German sap as marked on the trench map was doubtful'. They also brought back two German caps picked up in No Man's Land.

More rifle grenades fell in the Fusiliers' trenches on the 13th and one man was killed and another wounded. An officer's patrol explored an old communication trench running from the left fork of Solferino Sap straight into the German lines. Both ends had been barricaded, a German sentry being seen at the enemy's end.

Until the 19th the Battalion remained in the front line, not all four companies, for the rule at this period (so far as companies were concerned) was four days in the front line followed by two days in support and two in reserve.

Towards the end of this long tour the Bosche became increasingly active while his snipers were much more alert. The 17th of March was a noisy day, rifle grenades, trench-mortar bombs, snipers and the enemy's artillery making things very uncomfortable in the front line. Many 'whizz-bangs' were fired and 3 casualties were suffered—2 O.R.'s killed and 1 wounded.

On the 19th the Battalion was relieved and marched back to billets at Fosse 10, then on the 20th to Beugin.

From the 23rd of March to the middle of April the 2nd Division was out of the front line, resting, training and furnishing large working parties for the line and the defences generally. About 200 men carried 'Rogers' (Gas Cylinders) every night up to the front line—'the worst job of the War'. Until the 16th of the latter month

the Fusiliers were billeted successively in Hersin (1st-3rd), Calonne Ricouart (3rd-5th), Therouanne (5th-8th), Calonne Ricouart (8th-12th) and Hersin (12th-15th).

On the 16th of April the 17th relieved the 10th West Yorkshires in the Angres I sector: one man was wounded during the relief. The trenches taken over were south-west of Calonne and north-west of Angres (in the German lines), the enemy's defences in front of the latter forming a large salient. The 5th Brigade sub-sector ran from Vasseau Trench—Sap 8—Forest and Flapper Alley (south) to Bovril Alley (north).

The winter was practically over and now both sides were busy repairing the ravages caused by rain, frost and snow. No sooner were they settled in the line, therefore, than the Fusiliers were at work on the trenches, making good defective parapets, laying trench boards (supplies of which were now more abundant since their utility had been observed), building grenade-rifle emplacements and clearing new support lines. Wiring parties went out each night. The enemy was generally 'quiet': he too was hard at work, though occasionally he took it into his head to annoy the Battalion with rifle grenades and 'whizz-bangs' until reduced to silence by the Stokes guns and trench mortars.

On the 28th suspicious signs were observed. By means of smoke rockets the Germans were

testing the direction of the wind which appeared to indicate a gas attack. All precautions were therefore taken, but no gas attack materialized.

May opened with fine weather, and trench life (so far as the elements were concerned) became more bearable. At the same time, however, the pugnacity of the Bosche increased, which also meant an increase in our activity. On the 3rd of May the first officer's death is reported: 2nd Lieutenant B. R. Baker was killed on this date, two other ranks also being wounded.

Towards the end of the month the enemy attacked the 47th Division and recaptured a small portion of the northern end of the Vimy Ridge. The 17th Royal Fusiliers were then in billets in La Comte, and on the 24th were placed 'at one hour's notice' to move; but the 5th Brigade was not called upon, and on the 25th moved to the Fresnicourt area where the Battalion billeted in Estree-Cauchie.

The 6th of June found the Fusiliers in a new sector—Berthonval.

The following night Lieut. O. D. Pollak, Lance-Corporal Town and Privates J. Shargool and C. T. Davis went out to reconnoitre a trench recently lost by the 47th Division. The three men were part of the Battalion Patrol Section which had been formed at Bully-Grenay.¹ They found the trench unoccupied by the enemy and

¹ See Appendices.

crawled along it until reaching a communication trench running from the German lines. Here they found the Bosche repairing the trench. They then climbed out of the trench and walked through thick wire in full view of a strong Bosche working party who evidently thought the patrol their own people. Lieut. Pollak decided not to bomb them as his Battalion had a wiring party out and did not think retaliation desirable.

On the 7th also 2nd Lieutenant Johnstone was wounded.

A mining 'stunt' took place on the 28th. The Battalion on the previous day had relieved the 1st King's Royal Rifles in the Carency sector where trench warfare was on a very active scale. At 11.30 p.m. on the date in question the sappers blew a mine between Broadbridge and Mildren Craters. The 17th Royal Fusiliers supplied a covering party of bombers under Lieutenant Somerset, who came in for twenty minutes of severe bombardment which the Bosche opened almost immediately the mine had been blown. The Fusiliers lost two other ranks killed and Lieutenant Somerset and thirteen other ranks wounded—their heaviest casualties so far on any one day since their arrival in France; it was also the Battalion's first experience of crater fighting. The crater was, however, successfully occupied and consolidated. In this action the first M.M. awarded to the Battalion was won by Private W. Trimby.

July was in many ways a memorable month in the history of the Fusiliers: they made their first raid on the enemy and they took part in the Somme battles, though not on the 1st—the opening day of the offensive. It was also a month of sadness, for many officers and men were numbered amongst those who made the great sacrifice, loved mess-mates who died fighting, but live still in the hearts and minds of their comrades who survived.

On the 1st, when the great battle on the Somme opened, the Battalion was still in Carency trenches. At noon the Bosche fired some twenty to thirty 'minnies' which fell near the support line of the centre company. The Divisional howitzers then opened fire. At night the 6th Brigade, on the right of the 5th, made a raid on the enemy's trenches opposite Souchez, the raid being preceded by the blowing of three mines. Neither the 5th nor 99th Brigades were engaged though the trenches of the former were heavily shelled by the enemy between 12 midnight and 1.30 a.m. on the 2nd.

The Fusiliers were relieved during the night of the 2nd of July and moved back to Villers-au-Bois where, on the 6th, written orders for the raid were received. The raid had, however, been ordered verbally before that date, for rehearsals began on the 4th, while from the 3rd to the 6th nightly reconnaissances were made of the German

sap to be raided. On the first occasion Captain Stewart and Lieuts. Pollak and Wootton and an N.C.O. crossed No Man's Land; the next night Lieutenant Wootton and two N.C.O.'s carried out a similar reconnaissance; the third night all N.C.O.'s reconnoitred the Bosche trenches and lastly two N.C.O.'s went out to have a look at the position to be raided. On this last occasion an incident took place which nearly ended in the death of the Trench-Mortar Officer.

The two N.C.O.'s in question—Shargool and Burr—had already made their reconnaissance and were half-way back to their own trench when they suddenly discovered, between them and the German sap, a line of men, with one man in front, running towards them. The N.C.O.'s dropped into a shell-hole and threw bombs at the leader, actually hitting him though the bombs failed to explode. The two men then made a dash for their own lines followed by the 'foe' who turned out to be Captain Chevalier of the Trench Mortars and a party of men whom he had also taken out to have a look at the Bosche wire. But for the failure of the bombs (which had defective fuses) the incident must have ended tragically.

Fifth Brigade Operation Orders issued on the 6th stated that: 'The 17th Royal Fusiliers will carry out a raid on the enemy's trenches east of Pellitier Alley on the night of the 7th/8th of July

1916'. The objects of the raid are given as 'To destroy enemy machine-gun emplacements of which there are at least two and to capture the guns; to inflict the maximum of loss on the enemy; to obtain identifications'. The raiding party was to consist of three officers and sixty men in all, including four stretcher-bearers, seven Royal Engineers and two miners.

Into all the details of the raid it is unnecessary to go, but it is interesting to note that in this first raid carried out by the 17th Royal Fusiliers, the raiders were ordered to blacken their faces and steel-helmet covers, that the actual bombers were to carry only knobkerries as well as twelve bombs each, the other raiders being armed with rifle and bayonet, sixty rounds of ammunition and two bombs each.

The raid was to be made under cover of artillery, trench-mortar and machine-gun fire, zero hour being fixed at 1.5 a.m., 8th July.

Raids were always a gamble with Death, but they were also the fullest test of a man's courage. To engage an enemy at a distance is a far different thing from creeping towards his trenches in inky darkness, knowing full well that all the while you may be under observation and that hostile machine-guns and rifles are being sighted on you, awaiting only the psychological moment in which to open fire and riddle you with bullets. If darkness covered the approach of the raiders, it

held also many a terror. The possibility, indeed the almost certainty of sudden death for somebody, flitted continually across one's mind; it is not easy to put those thoughts aside and think only of getting in your blow first!

The first raid caused intense excitement in the Battalion: the rehearsals, carried out enthusiastically at Chateau de la Haie, were watched by deeply interested crowds.

The night came, and in the darkness the raiders began to creep out into No Man's Land. The latter was still thick in mud and the 'going' was likely to be difficult.

About an hour before 'Zero', Lance-Corporals Burr and Shargool laid tapes for forming up in No Man's Land.

What happened is best told in Colonel Higgins' report to Brigade Headquarters, for, despite the fact that the raid was unsuccessful, it is of historic interest:

'Captain Stewart was badly wounded and Lieutenant Wootton badly "shocked" and I was not able to question them before they were evacuated. Lieutenant Pollak is missing. All the men I have questioned give contradictory accounts: they were mostly very shaken and torn by wire and not very coherent.

'It appears that owing to the wet state of the ground and bursts of machine-gun fire, the whole of the parties were not in their places by zero hour. The leading parties were formed up, however, and effected an entry, after some difficulty with the wire, into the water-logged trench. I understand Lieutenant Pollak was not seen again after this.

'I am not clear if an entry into the sap was effected at all as the accounts all vary. The wire round the sap-head was strong according to reports and the Germans apparently ready for the raiding party. A machine gun was seized by two of our party and taken out of the trench, but could not be got further than the wire, both men being hit according to report. It appears the Germans threw the first bombs.'¹

From the Battalion diary it is evident that a few men succeeded in entering the German trenches, that Private W. N. White captured a machine gun but was hit on coming back and had to abandon his capture. Captain Stewart

¹ The following note by Mr. B. T. Warner (late Lance-Corporal, B Company) throws further light on this raid:

'I was a dugout bomber and I lost the rest of the party somewhere in Jerry's trenches, but when coming out at the end I met Woodruffe White, and at the end of the arm where we made our exit we found a machine gun on the parapet, unattended of course. Well, we got this out as far as the second—or outside—wire, and then the bandolier got entangled with the wire. We spent some time disentangling this and then wrapped it round the barrel of the gun as we could not extract it, but just as we bent down, one at each end, to pick it up and bring it away, a bomb (probably) burst behind me; both White and myself caught it somewhat badly, so before we attempted to get back to the lines, realizing we were no longer fit to carry a gun, we dumped it right into the middle of a shell-hole half full of water. It's a cert the Bosches never found it, anyway not before it was too corroded for further use. Woodruffe White was a B Company bomber, in fact he got a M.M. I think.

'I was carried or hauled from Jerry's wire by Stanley Wootton and Sergt. Tamplin, spent a month at Bruay where White and also Capt. Stewart went, and then came home.'

reached the German trenches but was severely wounded and was carried in by Corporal Burr, who was subsequently awarded the D.C.M. Captain Stewart and Lieutenant Wootton were both awarded the Military Cross. Lieutenant O. D. Pollak, first reported missing, was later found to have been killed. In other ranks the losses were 13 wounded and 7 missing.¹ Other decorations awarded for gallantry during the raid and in seeking the missing between the lines were Captain Stewart, Lieutenant Stanley Wootton and Lieutenant Roper, the Military Cross; Private White, the D.C.M.; and Privates Wiltshire, Trimbey and Shargool, the Military Medal.

At 6.30 p.m. on the 9th, the Germans exploded a mine between Football and Broadbridge Craters; the 17th Royal Fusiliers immediately consolidated the near lip. A party of the enemy attempted to work round the left flank and bomb the Fusiliers, but they were driven back with bombs, Sergeant Hastings and Privates Croudace and Wagstaffe displaying considerable gallantry, for which they were awarded the Military Medal.

¹ Of the seven other ranks missing one man, Private Gordon Miles, No. 8 Platoon, B Company, was wounded and made a prisoner. He was sent to a German camp at Dulman and in May, 1918, escaped. After seven days of wandering he crossed the frontier into Holland. He was afterwards awarded the Military Medal for gallantry in effecting his escape. For further notes on this Raid see appendix by Mr. J. A. Shargool.

Captain Hole (O.C.C. Company) and Lieutenant Hewitt (A Company) and 8 other ranks were wounded, while 5 other ranks were killed in this affair. Very early the next morning, whilst out wiring, 2nd Lieutenant Pechell was wounded.

The Battalion on relief moved back to Carency, Cabaret Rouge and Zouave Valley, from what, so far, had been its most eventful tour in the front line.

It was also the last tour in the Carency sector, for the Division was under orders for the Somme. On the 13th of July, therefore, the Royal Fusiliers left the support trenches for Maisnil Bouche, moving on the 15th to Marest, on the 20th to Pernes Station whence trains carried the Battalion to Saleux, where a fifteen-mile march to Vaux-sur-Somme finished off a very tiring day.

Finally, on the 23rd, the Fusiliers marched to Happy Valley where they bivouacked. They had come to bear their share of the Somme battles, which on that date had reached a desperate stage.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVIL'S WOOD

SIX woods there are (or rather were) on the Somme battlefields of 1916, which every one who took part in the bloody struggles of that year must know: Mametz, Bernafay, Trones, Delville, High Wood, and the two Bazentin Woods which may be counted as one as they almost overlap one another. They formed a rough circle with Delville Wood at the north-eastern verge facing east, north-east and north. Along the western face of the Wood was Longueval Village, east stood Ginchy, while running south-east (from the south-western corner) was the Longueval-Guillemont road on which, about half-way between the two villages, was Waterlot Farm. North-west of the Wood was High Wood, Trones Wood was due south and Bernafay south-west.

In shape Delville Wood resembled a dog's head, with the nose and muzzle pointing due east, thus forming a salient; indeed, on the 23rd of July when the 17th Royal Fusiliers arrived in

the Happy Valley, the whole Wood formed a dangerous salient in the British line, which ran almost due south from the south-eastern corner to Maltz Horn Farm, and almost due west from the north and north-western outskirts to Pozieres.

Upon this salient the fury of the enemy broke again and again.

The Happy Valley, to which the Fusiliers had come, lay just west of Montauban (popularly known as 'Montybong'). In summer it was not an unpleasant spot, though when the Battalion went into bivouacs it had to cross the old British and German front lines, battered and scarred and broken by the fierce bombardments and shell-fire which had fallen upon them. The weather was fine though dull. The 5th Brigade was destined to stay but a few hours in the Valley, for on the 24th orders were received to relieve the 8th Infantry Brigade (3rd Division) in the Waterlot Farm sector on the 25th; the 2nd Highland Light Infantry were to take over the front line, the 17th Royal Fusiliers were to send one Company (D) to Trones Wood to relieve troops of the 35th Division, the three remaining Companies to Longueval Alley; the 24th Royal Fusiliers were to take over Bernafay Wood and the 2nd Oxford and Bucks were to occupy trenches south-west of Montauban.

On the night of the 24th/25th the 99th Brigade had relieved troops of the 3rd Division in Delville

Wood. The Wood was then in our possession, having been stormed by the South African troops of the 9th Division on the 15th of July when Waterlot Farm and Longueval Village also passed into our hands. But on the 18th the enemy developed his expected counter-attack against the Wood, and, after very heavy shell-fire, by sheer weight of numbers, though at very heavy cost, forced his way through the northern and north-eastern portions of the Wood and into the northern half of Longueval. Such, roughly, was the situation when the 2nd Division took over the line on the nights of the 24th/25th and 25th/26th of July.

During the evening of the 25th the Fusiliers left Happy Valley for the line. D Company, on arrival in Trones Wood at about midnight, sent out two platoons from the eastern edge who advanced about two hundred yards without opposition; they then dug in in a new trench, the other two platoons remaining in a very wide trench on the edge of the Wood. In this position D Company remained throughout the 26th, the forward platoons at night continuing work on the trench which they deepened to from five to six feet. In the meantime A, B and C Companies, in that order from north to south, with Battalion Headquarters, had during the night of the 25th 26th reached Longueval Alley.

Longueval Alley ran in a south-westerly

direction from west of Waterlot Farm, entering the northern end of Trones Wood, then in an irregular line to the north-eastern corner of Bernafay Wood. Fierce fighting had already taken place for the possession of Trones Wood before, on the 14th, the enemy had been finally driven from it only after violent counter-attacks; the place was, therefore, something of a shambles.

'Fritz' was busy with his guns during the relief: he was using a kind of shell new to the Fusiliers—lachrymatory shells—which caused tears to flow with all the effect of violent weeping. One officer—Lieutenant Richmond—was gassed.

At 2.15 a.m. on the 26th sounds of heavy bombing and the crackle of rifle-fire from the direction of Delville Wood caused the Fusiliers to 'stand to' in Longueval Alley, otherwise the situation in the front line was normal. Throughout the day the enemy shelled the trenches with high-explosive and shrapnel: 3 other ranks were killed and 12 wounded. At night, beginning at 10 p.m., he turned his guns on to Bernafay Wood and plastered it with gas shells for hours without a break, but the 17th had only one man 'gassed'.¹ That night Colonel Higgins sent out two N.C.O.'s and a Private of the Battalion Scouts to gain touch with the 18th Lancashire Fusiliers (35th Division) on the right of D Company and warn

¹ Casualties during the 26th were 3 other ranks killed and 12 wounded.

them that 17th Royal Fusiliers scouts would reconnoitre their front that night. Two of the men lost their way and got into Delville Wood, but, having discovered their mistake, returned via Angle Trench to Trones Wood and delivered their message. The two N.C.O.'s then patrolled out in front of the Wood to a depth of two hundred yards, but had nothing to report.

The 27th, however, was ghastly in the extreme! The 2nd Division had been ordered to attack and capture the whole of Delville Wood—zero hour for the attack was 7.10 a.m. The 17th Royal Fusiliers were not one of the attacking battalions, but it is a question whether they would have suffered more than they did in Longueval Alley. For when the 99th Brigade attacked the Wood the enemy's guns opened fire on the whole area and on Longueval Alley especially, or so it seemed. All communications with the Wood were very quickly broken as high-explosive and shrapnel lashed the trenches in which the Fusiliers crouched, trying to take cover from that awful storm. At about 1 p.m. a runner from the King's Royal Rifles, who with the 23rd Royal Fusiliers in a most gallant fight had cleared the enemy out of most of the Wood, passed through the 17th Royal Fusiliers with a message to the 22nd Royal Fusiliers to reinforce the Rifles; he stated that the enemy was trying to work round the right flank.

At 2 p.m. A and B Companies of the 17th were placed at the disposal of the 99th Infantry Brigade and moved up to Delville Wood. Major Mackenzie, guided by one of the Battalion scouts who on the previous night had wandered into Delville Wood by mistake, led the two Companies to the King's Royal Rifles Headquarters just inside the southern edge of the Wood. On the way up shell-fire was terrific and B Company (Captain Parsons) lost several men though Angle Trench was a fairly safe approach to the Wood.

On arrival at the Headquarters of the Rifles two platoons of the 17th Royal Fusiliers with two Lewis guns were sent up to reinforce the posts, while one of the companies relieved C Company of the King's Royal Rifles. The front line at this period was a chain of shell-holes and blown-in trenches just inside the far edge of the Wood.

The horrors of that ghastly place were now everywhere evident. The fearful havoc created by our barrage of the early morning, when no less than 369 guns of all calibres had poured a continuous storm of shells upon the unfortunate enemy, had piled destruction upon destruction. Branches of trees had been flung about in all directions; the thick undergrowth of the wood was pitted with shell-holes into which the enemy had crept for shelter—the whole place was in a state of indescribable confusion—to the attackers

it was almost like creeping through a jungle, not knowing where the enemy was lurking or at what minute he might be encountered. The dead were everywhere—equipment littered the ground; and, above all, in the momentary pauses between one shell-burst and another, the moans or agonized cries of the wounded, calling for water or assistance, lent a final touch to an altogether ghastly scene. In moving up to the front line casualties were heavy, including officers and N.C.O.'s. Captain Parsons was badly wounded, Sergeants Slack and Richards had been killed and Sergeant Andrews also severely wounded. Lieutenant Joelson did good work in finding good positions for his machine gunners. N.C.O.'s, who found themselves in charge of somewhat isolated posts close to the enemy, organized their parties splendidly. Lance-Corporal King (of A Company, later promoted sergeant and killed at Beaumont Hamel on the 13th of November) earned special praise for his fine handling of about two dozen men.

At about 2.15 p.m. the 17th Middlesex passed Battalion Headquarters on their way up to Delville Wood; they were followed by the 2nd South Staffords and two companies of the 22nd Royal Fusiliers carrying S.A.A. and tools.

All day long the shelling of Longueval Alley continued, and when darkness had fallen over the battlefield the 17th Royal Fusiliers had lost

heavily considering that they made no attack. For the first time since they landed in France their casualties in 'other ranks' alone exceeded one hundred. Two officers (Lieutenant R. H. Fletcher and 2nd Lieutenant S. Penny, both 14th Battalion, attached 17th) had been killed, and 2 more (Captain Knocker and Lieutenant Robinson) wounded; 15 other ranks were killed, 90 wounded and 7 missing.

That night the situation in Delville Wood was comparatively quiet and scouts from A and B Companies spent most of it in locating the wounded and various posts.

Some time during the night of the 27th/28th, or early on the latter date, Colonel Higgins moved his Headquarters to the western side of Bernafay Wood. The next entry in the Battalion diary (on the 28th), however, is somewhat misleading. It states: 'B, C and D Companies respectively in trenches on west, north and east sides of Bernafay Wood.¹ A Company moved back to Breslau Trench. The Wood was shelled intermittently all day. Casualties 10 killed, 13 wounded, 1 missing.'

There is, however, an entry in the Battalion diary which states at the head of events on the 29th of July that 'A and B Companies left Delville Wood at 6 a.m.'

¹ The Battalion had apparently been relieved by the 24th Royal Fusiliers.

A private account concerning A and B Companies states:

'At dawn on the 28th the stretcher-bearers were guided to the worst cases which were quickly evacuated. Major Mackenzie kept his runners busy in maintaining touch with the advanced posts. The shelling was fairly bad, but the chief trouble was water. The heat was terrific and the fumes made matters worse. But in the afternoon Regimental Sergeant-Major Haines, by dint of a good bit of work, got some water (of which there was a plentiful supply in Longueval Alley in charge of Corporal H. Ward Fox) up to Major Mackenzie who sent word to the firing line asking for water carriers. The water was brought up by the train section. That evening the 17th Middlesex reinforced the depleted forces and further ammunition arrived; the counter-attack launched by the enemy was cheerfully and successfully dealt with. A timely artillery barrage cut off a large body of Germans who were practically wiped out by bombs and rifle and machine-gun fire. During the succeeding lull the 9th Essex relieved the 17th Royal Fusiliers, the last of whom left the dreadful Wood at 11 a.m. on the 29th.' ¹

Captain Coates, the Battalion M.O., did splendid work and was eventually awarded the M.C.

The results of the operations of the 27th and 28th were that the 2nd Division had captured the whole of Delville Wood, while on the left the 5th Division had secured the better part of Longueval, only the orchards and posts north of the village remaining in the hands of the enemy.

On the 29th the 17th Royal Fusiliers relieved the 24th Battalion in Longueval Alley, disposi-

¹ Contributed by Mr. J. A. Shargool.

tions of companies being the same as before. On this date 2nd Lieutenant R. Ramsbottom (29th Battalion, attached 17th) was killed and 2nd Lieutenant Lelievre and 6 other ranks were wounded.

In connection with the struggle for Delville Wood (and the previous tour on Vimy Ridge) Mr. P. G. Smith (late Lance-Corporal C Company) contributes the following interesting note as showing the spirit and humour of some of the lads:

'Lance-Corporal Fred Hempsted of "C" Company who was for a long time in the Transport Lines found it a bit too quiet and asked to come into the line with the "boys". He came with me in my section and was very cool under all conditions at Vimy Ridge. When on the Somme he was detailed for duty, carrying up to Delville Wood. While in the Wood he was asked for a light for a cigarette and obliged. A whizz-bang resulted, and tore an arm and leg off poor Hempsted. He was picked up conscious and rushed to the Casualty Station where Dr. Coates attended to him. The Doctor said, "I am terribly sorry to see you in this state, Hempsted." The reply he got was, "Don't trouble about me, Doctor, you can do nothing for me—I can only die like a man." He died within the hour, none more bravely.

'Another, Private T. Astle, who was in my section, when around Vimy made up the following, which was sung by the lads to the tune of an old Scotch air, the name of which I forget:

"The Ox and Bucks went over the top
With the H.L.I. behind them
They looked around for the Fusiliers
But —— if they could find them.

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Up came the gallant Seventeenth
With Major Turner leading
And old P.G. with a coil of wire
And his hands all torn and bleeding.”

Private Tom Astle was one of the Miners who
came to us and was a Lancashire lad.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF GUILLEMONT¹

AT 4.45 a.m. on the 30th of July the XIII. Corps (30th Division on the right, 2nd Division on the left) attacked the enemy's defences between Falfemont and Waterlot Farms. The 5th Brigade carried out the operations on the 2nd Division front, the two assaulting battalions being the 2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, on the right, and the 24th Royal Fusiliers, on the left. Their objective was the German line between Waterlot Farm and Guillemont, including a trench running parallel with the Longueval-Guillemont road.

The 17th Royal Fusiliers were ordered to carry out the following duties in connection with the attack: one company was to reach the eastern end of Longueval Alley eight minutes after zero hour in order to occupy Angle Trench when the

¹ The official date of the Battle is '3rd September, 1916', but the struggle for possession of the village (or all that was left of it) began in July and continued throughout August, no less than five attempts being made to capture it.

latter was vacated by the second company of the 24th Royal Fusiliers on the latter advancing to carry out work in connecting the German line with Delville Wood. The Company detailed was C (under Captain Knocker), who was to come under the orders of the O.C. 24th Royal Fusiliers while holding the line. D Company (under Captain D. Farquharson) of the Battalion was to hold the eastern face of Trones Wood, the remaining companies to be in Longueval Alley.

Angle Trench ran from about half-way along the southern face of Delville Wood south-west across the triangle formed by the Longueval-Ginchy and Longueval-Guillemont roads, joining up with the latter north of Waterlot Farm.

At zero hour (4.45 a.m.) the Oxford and Bucks attacked in the direction of Guillemont Station, but were held up almost immediately by machine-gun fire and by bombs thrown from bombing posts just south-east of Waterlot Farm. On the left of the Oxford and Bucks the 24th Fusiliers similarly failed to take the German trenches allotted to them. Heavy mist impeded the advance and the ground, 'pock-marked' by shell-holes, made the keeping of direction almost impossible.

The first attack on Guillemont failed.

C Company of the 17th Royal Fusiliers, in position at the northern end of Longueval Alley where they were waiting for the 24th Royal

Fusiliers to vacate Angle Trench, did not move at all, for the second company of that Battalion (owing to the failure of the forward companies to capture the German trench) was not required to consolidate the line. The 17th Royal Fusiliers, therefore, were not called upon to move. But all day long the enemy's guns swept Longueval Alley with a merciless hail of shell, and at the close of the day Lieutenant E. P. Underwood and 3 other ranks had been killed and 2nd Lieutenants Davison and Stables and 42 other ranks wounded.

Three Germans surrendered to the Company in Trones Wood at 3 a.m.

On the morning of the 31st the Bosche shelling was less violent, though during the day 3 more other ranks were killed and 19 wounded.

A Company of the 17th Royal Fusiliers went forward and relieved a company of the Oxford and Bucks in the front line at Waterlot Farm, the remainder of the Battalion being still in support in Longueval Alley.

On the 1st of August relief came, and the Fusiliers moved back to reserve trenches between Montauban and Carnoy. The day had been comparatively quiet though ten men were wounded. But the next morning violent gunfire again broke out and the whole area, front line, reserve and support positions were heavily shelled, and for an hour pandemonium reigned.

At night the Battalion 'stood to', for about 8.30 p.m. a message arrived at Battalion Headquarters that an S.O.S. signal had gone up on the right. Once again the enemy's guns poured a storm of shell on and about Montauban and continued to do so through the dark hours: casualties—I killed, 6 wounded.

On the 3rd the Battalion moved up and took over the front line at Waterlot Farm from the Oxford and Bucks. At 8.30 p.m. and at 9 p.m. there were bursts of shell-fire, and an hour later (at 10 p.m.) the Bosche opened a heavy bombardment which did not cease until dawn on the 4th, 4 other ranks being killed and 8 wounded.

Throughout the 4th the ruins of Waterlot Farm were shelled intermittently, Angle Trench having been shelled all night.

During the night, under the personal supervision of Lieut.-Colonel Higgins, O.C. Battalion, a new trench was dug from the south-eastern corner of Delville Wood, in front of Waterlot Farm, to the road running on the eastern side of the latter, joining up with the Fusiliers in trenches some two hundred yards south of the Farm. Four more other ranks killed and 11 wounded were added to the already long casualty list suffered by the Fusiliers since they had moved up into the line.

On the 5th of August the enemy is reported

as being 'rather quieter': 1 other rank killed, 6 wounded.

During the 6th the enemy's guns were busy registering the newly-dug trench, which foreboded no good in the near future, but fortunately that night the Fusiliers were relieved by the 13th Essex and moved back again to their old reserve positions between Montauban and Carnoy; two companies, following later, moved to the former village for garrison purposes.

For the time being the Battalion had turned its back upon the front line, for although on the 8th orders were received to move up to the line on the following day, they were cancelled, and on the 10th the Fusiliers marched to the Sandpit area at Meaulte, and on the 11th (in Brigade) to Ville-sur-Ancre where they occupied tents.

The 12th was a rest day, excepting of course for the normal routine of cleaning up.

The 13th saw the 17th on the march to Mericourt L'Abbe where they entrained for Saleux, marching thence on arrival to Picquigny which formed part of the area taken over by the 2nd Division on withdrawal from the battlefield.

From the time the Battalion left the Happy Valley on the 25th of July until the 6th of August when they were relieved in the Waterlot Farm sector—twelve days in all—the 17th Royal Fusiliers had lost 4 officers killed and 7 wounded, and in other ranks 45 killed, 225 wounded and

8 missing—an appalling casualty list which shows the severity of the enemy's shell-fire.

The somewhat necessarily bald narrative (since there are no other particulars available) of the Battalion's actions during the Battle of Guillemont gives little of the true picture of the Somme battlefield at this period. The shell-fire of both sides was terrific, resembling even that in the Ypres Salient where, night and day, the guns were seldom silent, where the shriek and moaning of shells as they passed overhead, and the nerve-racking explosions as they burst with a roar spreading death and destruction, had created an evil reputation which made men shudder when they knew they were detailed for that part of the line.

By the beginning of August it was said on the Somme that a subaltern's life was worth only about a week's purchase, so dreadful were the casualties amongst officers.

From the 1st of July to the 9th of August (inclusive) our losses in the Somme battles were 5,574 officers and no less than 133,833 other ranks in killed, wounded and missing.

And four more months were to pass ere mud and water, snow, and all the rigours of a hard winter put an end, for the time being, to the seemingly-eternal struggle.

CHAPTER V

THREE MONTHS OF TRENCH WARFARE

PICQUIGNY is eleven miles from Saleux and on the Amiens-Abbeville road. The Fusiliers therefore had quite a long march before they reached billets on the 13th of August; for it was surprising how trench warfare affected one's marching powers. During training out of the line that distance was nothing, but coming fresh out of the line, where conditions were always more or less cramped, without having had opportunities for recreational training—eleven miles taxed one's feet considerably.

But the Battalion swung along the road in good style, feeling, for the nonce, that delicious sense of freedom from the everlasting scream of shells, the raucous rat-tat-tat of machine-gun fire and the roar of ear-splitting explosions.

They had come out of the line much depleted: for the first time their casualties had reached three figures and the battered earth of the Somme covered many a gallant comrade and friend of those seemingly far-away days at Court Farm; it

was not so very long—not a year—since the gayest and happiest Battalion had left the shores of England.

And now, tired and trench-stained, as they footed it along the Amiens road to Picquigny, they sang and whistled the songs of France and Flanders: it was War, and Death took friend, dear pal, and foe alike.

But none forgot their lost comrades.

Three days were spent in billets in Picquigny, and then on the 16th the Fusiliers marched to Flesselles, for the 2nd Division had been ordered to relieve the Guards Division in the front line in the northern area of the Somme battlefield.

The new Divisional front was a wide stretch of trenches about four thousand yards in length south of Hebuterne, with Watling Street and Ten Poplars the southern and western boundaries respectively; later the 31st Division came in on the left of the 2nd and took over part of the Divisional front, the latter side-stepping slightly to the south.

All three Brigades went into the line, 5th on the right, 6th in the centre and 99th on the left. The 5th Brigade area included La Signy Farm which lay well behind the front line. Each Brigade received orders to have two battalions in the front line, one in support and one in reserve. The 17th Royal Fusiliers and 2nd Highland

Light Infantry were detailed to go into the front line on the 5th Brigade front.

The Brigade boundaries were Watling Street (Roman Road), on the south, to Flag Avenue, north, the boundary between the two front-line battalions being Egg Street—a portion of Vallade Trench—Borden Avenue to its junction with the Roman Road, all of which were maintained by the left Battalion, which at this period was the 17th Royal Fusiliers.

In front of the northern half the Battalion front was a section of trench which had been abandoned, though posts were placed out in the old front line. Behind this portion of old trench ran the front line proper, but there was a long communication trench (Delaunay Avenue) from the former back to a road in rear of the support line.

From south to north the trenches in the left battalion sector were Borden Avenue, Wolf Trench, Minor Trench, Wicker Trench, Delaunay Avenue, Monk Trench, Board Street and Flag Avenue.

Behind and in the forward system of trenches were such well-known names as Regent Circus, The Lyceum, Hyde Park Corner, Bow Street, Waterloo Bridge and New Cut—all of which denoted the naming by a London division or unit.

In front of the right battalion sector lay the Redan, a work given up by the French when they were in occupation of this part of the line owing

to hostile mining operations. But it had been prepared as a defensive mining system protecting the front line: the portion of the Brigade front.

The enemy's lines at the northern extremity of the sector lay almost at the foot of a forward slope which crossed a valley at the head of which were the British trenches. Opposite the portion of old disused trenches on the left battalion front was the German Quadrilateral which formed a salient in the enemy's line. It was believed to be unoccupied by day but held at night. From this point the German lines gradually rose to the crest of the Redan Ridge and finally disappeared into the valley in which was the village of Beaumont Hamel.

The 17th Royal Fusiliers (having marched from Flesselles on the 17th to Elenvillers, and from the latter place to Bus-les-Artois on the 18th) had relieved the 1st Welsh Guards¹ (3rd Guards Brigade) in the front line which they describe as being near La Signy Farm. They held from Egg to Flag Street, for their records state, 'Only small portions of old front line occupied: mostly held by bombing posts and Lewis guns at heads of communication trenches',

¹ The Guards informed the Fusiliers that the Germans opposite were Saxons and that this part of the line was very quiet. One lived by comparison in those days and 'quietude' to one unit, having probably come from a particularly 'noisy' part of the line, such as the Ypres Salient, was 'lively' to another.

one of which was Bess Street. Two companies were in the front line, two in support.

The Bosche was quiet; indeed, north of the Ancre, since the first day of the offensive on the 1st of July, Sir Douglas Haig had ordered a slow and methodical advance on the left: 'North of the Ancre such preparations were to be made as would hold the enemy to his positions and enable the attack to be resumed there later if desirable'.

At present (in August, 1916) it was not desirable, therefore the opposing sides were engaged in trench warfare with its days and nights of alternate quietude and liveliness. The first day in the line (20th of August) happened to be one of the quiet days during which the Fusiliers were able to take stock of their surroundings. They observed that the wire in front of their trenches was very poor indeed, whereas that in front of the enemy's trenches appeared very strong, both in front of his first, second and third lines. They were able to calculate also that the distance between the two lines, i.e. the width of No Man's Land, varied from one hundred to four hundred yards, the greatest width being opposite Egg and the shortest between their trenches and the German Quadrilateral.

On the night of the 20th/21st wiring parties were busy putting out more wire and strengthening that in existence; they were not interfered with by the enemy. At 6 a.m. on the 21st the

enemy's trench mortars opened fire, but only one other rank was wounded all day. Wiring again occupied the night hours.

By the 22nd the enemy seems to have located Battalion Headquarters, which were shelled intermittently, but little else happened until after darkness had fallen. Then from 9 p.m. until 9.30 p.m. and from 10 p.m. until 10.30 p.m. he 'minned' Monk and Wicker Trenches, doing considerable damage to the defences. The Divisional Artillery retaliated rapidly and the enemy's 'minnies' subsided. They were, however, evidently intended to cover the advance of one of his patrols across No Man's Land, for shortly after 10.30 p.m. a hostile party, estimated at from six to twelve, entered the old front line just north of Delaunay Avenue and worked south towards the Lewis-gun post. The sentry on duty challenged but was shot. The Lewis gun then opened fire and the patrol made off, but not before two men were seen to fall. They could not, however, be found. A party of A Company bombers, under 2nd Lieutenant Martin, hurried up in support of the front line. On arrival a bomb burst in the trench, badly wounding the officer and 5 men. The casualties of the Fusiliers were 2 other ranks killed, 2 officers (2nd Lieutenants Martin and Collins) and 5 other ranks wounded.

This small incident closed the tour, for on the

23rd the Battalion was relieved and marched back to Bus, moving on the 24th to Cuigneux.

Five days out of the line and then on the 29th the Fusiliers went back again into the same sub-sector, relieving the 2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. On the following night the Bandmaster, Sergeant Norrington, who had never been in the trenches, volunteered to go up with a carrying party. On the return journey a rifle grenade burst in the midst of the party, shattering his leg, while Sergeant Tamplin of D Company (a very popular N.C.O.), who had done fine work on several occasions, was killed.

Nothing happened on the 29th until the evening when shrapnel began to burst over Legend (just east of Hyde Park Corner). At 8.45 p.m. a German gave himself up at Flag Street bombing post.

Rain began to fall, and soon the trenches became very uncomfortable; before morning they were water-logged, and it was evident that parapets would soon be falling—a forecast of what was to happen in the future. The 30th was comparatively peaceful, only a few shells falling on Board and Wolf Trenches. Patrols could not go out at night as the Brigade machine-gunners had been ordered to fire at gaps in the enemy's wire, thus preventing his working parties from repairing it. On the 31st things livened up a bit. Throughout the day the front line was

shelled intermittently with shrapnel, and at 6.30 p.m. Battalion Headquarters again came in for heavy shelling. One shell fell on a small dump of rockets, S.A.A. and Very lights, and it was set on fire: a regular firework display, punctuated by explosions of ammunition, followed, 2 other ranks were wounded.

The first four days of September showed an increase in the activity of the Bosche artillery, while at night the enemy bombarded the front line with 'minnies', 'whizz-bangs' and any other 'stuff' he could put over. Perhaps he was getting nervous about his line north of the Ancre, for further south Guillemont had fallen on the 3rd and the village, a mere rubble-heap, had at last passed into our hands. North-west of Guillemont the salient, of which Gommecourt was the northern point, was gradually becoming more pronounced and the Bosche was expectant of fresh attacks in that area. On the 3rd, also, an attack had taken place on the enemy's trenches north of Thiepval. Altogether he was in a nervous condition.

On the night of the 4th one of the Fusiliers bombing posts captured a German. He was one of a patrol of fifteen and had lost his way. He was armed with rifle and three bombs. Gas and tear shells fell in the Battalion sector during the night, but apparently there were no casualties. Relief came on the 5th of September when one

company marched back to Colincamps, another with Battalion Headquarters to Courcelles, but two companies remained in the reserve trenches.

Little need be said of the next few days out of the line, excepting that on the 9th the following entry appears in the Battalion diary: 'Day fine. Second anniversary of the formation of the Battalion. Band concert and football match in the afternoon'.

Two years! Pickering Court, Court Farm, Clipstone, Tidworth—they were gradually becoming far-distant in the all-absorbing business of fighting. But it was 'a great War'—such were men's thoughts. Only on 'leave' did the place of one's training become real once more: when the ever-present phantom of Death had been left behind and the lines of dirty, muddy trenches ceased, for the nonce, to be a terrible nightmare.

The next tour in the line was of a far different nature from those preceding it. A raid had been ordered—identifications were needed. All along the Divisional front patrols were to cross No Man's Land and enter the enemy's trenches.

The Battalion went back into the front line on the night of the 10th—dispositions same as before. Despite the fact that hostile machine guns were active during the evening, two wiring parties were out. One officer—2nd Lieutenant R. C. S. Gaddum—was killed.

During the afternoon of the 11th the Bosche shelled the support lines heavily for some hours. Battalion Headquarters received a good deal of attention, and unfortunately the Adjutant—Lieutenant E. Roper—was mortally wounded, dying the next day. Six other ranks were also wounded. The German guns were again busy on the 12th. Orders for the raid were issued by 5th Brigade Headquarters at 8 a.m. on the 14th: all three Brigades were to send out parties of raiders.

The 2nd Highland Light Infantry, on the right, and 17th Royal Fusiliers, on the left, were to carry out the raid from the 5th Brigade front.

The Fusiliers were to furnish two officers and twenty other ranks, divided into two parties each of one officer and ten N.C.O.'s and men. A and B Companies supplied the raiders.

The 17th were to raid the enemy's trenches on the south-western and north-western faces of the Quadrilateral after the Divisional guns had cut the wire and Stokes mortars had fired one 'minute rapid' on the objective. The Highland Light Infantry were to raid the enemy's line south of the Fusiliers and north-east of the Redan.

At zero a mine was to be blown opposite Cat Street (in the Highland Light Infantry area), the explosion being the signal for the raiders to enter the enemy's trenches.

Apart from obtaining identifications, these raids were designed for the purpose of assisting

operations further south, due to begin on the 15th.

There are no detailed narratives extant which give the full story of the raid, either in the Battalion or Brigade diaries. Only the following brief information was obtainable:

Zero hour was at midnight. Under cover of the barrage the raiders crept out into No Man's Land and laid down until the signal to advance was given.

The Stokes guns then opened 'the minute of hate' and the raiders crawled even nearer their objective. There was then a terrific explosion—the mine opposite Cat Street 'went up' and the raiders rushed forward; and fearsome-looking individuals they were too. Faces had been blackened, bludgeons had replaced rifles, whilst some carried revolvers: enough to inspire terror in those whom they encountered.

The mine had not, however, exploded under the enemy's wire as intended, and the H.L.I. were unable to get into the Bosche trenches, the guns also having failed to cut a way through the entanglements.

The Fusiliers succeeded in getting into the enemy's front-line trench at two places, but unfortunately found it empty. At the expiration of ten minutes (the time allowed) the raiders returned to their own lines. One other rank was slightly wounded.

The result of the raid was very disappointing, for the operation had been well practised and all ranks were confident of success.

On the 16th the Fusiliers were relieved and returned to Coigneux, moving on the 19th to Vauchelles for the remainder of September.

Practice attacks took the principal form of training during this period out of the front line, for already it was mooted that the Bosche north of the Ancre was to be attacked as soon as the weather permitted. The original intention had been to attack at the end of September, but the persistence of rain which turned the trenches and No Man's Land into veritable seas of mud, made offensive operations impossible and postponements were frequent.

The 2nd of October saw the Battalion (in Brigade) on the march to Bus, and on the 3rd to Mailly Maillet, where hutments sheltered the Fusiliers for several days. The whole of the 2nd Division had come out of the line on the 19th of September and remained in Corps Reserve until the 1st October. On that date the 6th Brigade took over the Hebuterne sector, the 99th Brigade, the Serre-Redan sector, while the 5th Brigade remained in Divisional reserve still engaged in training. But on the 6th October the latter Brigade returned to the front line, the 17th Royal Fusiliers relieving the 1st Royal Berkshires in the Serre sector. By this date

changes had taken place along the Divisional front. Hebuterne had been given up to the 51st (the 'Kilties') Division, the 6th Brigade moving back out of the line while the 5th Brigade relieved the 99th; the 2nd Division therefore now held the line with only one brigade. But the 5th had hardly settled down in the line when the 3rd Division and the Naval (63rd) Division took over the Serre and Redan sectors respectively. The Fusiliers with other units of the 5th Brigade then marched back to the Lealvillers area for further training.

This period (8th-16th October) out of the line was of a strenuous nature. For the first two or three days Company and Brigade training and practice attacks over taped dummy trenches occupied all ranks. But on the 11th, Divisional training began when the Division as a whole rehearsed the assault of the Bosche lines over facsimile trenches. This rehearsal was repeated on the 15th and 16th, while between times Battalion and Brigade attacks, bombing raids, blocking trenches and the blowing up of traverses took place.

The Fusiliers moved to bivouacs near Mailly Maillet on the 17th and into billets the following night. Large working parties had now to be furnished for duty with the sappers and gunners. Work largely consisted of digging dug-outs, gun-pits and in generally preparing for the coming offensive.

On the 22nd October the Battalion went back into the line (Redan sector), but only until the following night when the 24th Royal Fusiliers and H.L.I. took over the trenches and the Fusiliers returned to Mailly Maillet. But just before the relief was completed Sergeant F. G. Diddams (a very popular N.C.O.) was killed, which cast a gloom over the sergeants of A Company. Nine other ranks were also wounded. Another twenty-four hours were spent in the line (27th–28th October) but without incident.

The 1st of November found the Fusiliers billeted in Arqueves, from which place no move took place until the march to Bertrancourt.

The Battalion diary of the 11th November then outlines the final move before the great battle of the 13th began: '11th November. Battalion in hutments in Bertrancourt; moved to Mailly Wood E. in afternoon. All officers and 40 N.C.O.'s made final reconnaissance of forming up positions for the forthcoming operations and placed bridges in position'.

Trench warfare had, for the time being, come to an end and once again the Battalion was to attack the enemy.

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF THE ANCRE, 1916: 13TH-18TH NOVEMBER

RAIN! Rain! Rain! October had been a dreadful month. Time after time 'Z' Day (the day of Battle) had been announced only to be cancelled owing to wet weather. But at last, early in November, there were a few fine days, and once again every one prepared for the attack. The condition of the trenches was by now appalling. Dug-outs had fallen in, gun-pits were deep in water: water in the front line averaged from knee-deep to waist-deep. And where the elements had not destroyed the defences, their destruction was wrought by the enemy's guns and trench mortars. The communication trenches were quagmires, and the area round about pock-marked with shell-holes full of mud and water. Reliefs took hours to accomplish, for progress to and from the front line was painfully slow.

Amidst such conditions every one was preparing for the great battle due to begin on the 13th.

To use a colloquial phrase, then in use in France and Flanders, 'Fritz' was 'for it'. The infantry of the 2nd Division had been out of the line training for the attack, but the gunners (for whom relief came seldom) had been busy all the time pounding the German trenches and wire entanglements, blowing his defences to bits and generally reducing them (or doing their best to reduce them) to a state which would render them easy to capture.

But 'Fritz' knew he was to be attacked, and as fast as our guns blasted his surface defences to atoms, so he rebuilt them; but his underground defences were scarcely touched for all that savage hail of shell which for three weeks had poured upon them.

And north of the Ancre 'Fritz's' defences *were* strong indeed:

'The enemy's defences in this area (the Ancre) were already extremely formidable when they resisted our assault on the 1st of July; and the succeeding period of four months had been spent in repairing and adding to them in the light of the experience he had gained in the course of our attack further south. The hamlet of St. Pierre Divion and the villages of Beaucourt-sur-Ancre and Beaumont Hamel, like the rest of the villages forming part of the enemy's original front in this district, were evidently intended by him to form a permanent line of fortifications while he developed his offensive elsewhere. Realizing that his position in them had become a dangerous one, the enemy had multiplied the number of his guns covering this part of the line, and at the end of October introduced an

additional division on his front between Grandcourt and Hebuterne.'¹

Four months? For two years or more the Bosche had been busy in this part of the line, strengthening it and turning the villages into veritable fortresses. His dug-outs were marvels of construction; he had trench mortars and heavy machine guns on lifts which disappeared into the bowels of the earth when our guns were particularly active. He did not mean to be turned out of this part of his front without a violent struggle, though he was now holding a dangerous salient, for Thiepval had been wrested from him in September.

The front to be attacked ran from east of Schwaben Redoubt (south of the Ancre) to north of Serre. The 2nd Division was to attack from about the centre of Hunter Street (due east of the White City) to Board Street: 5th Infantry Brigade on the right, 6th Infantry Brigade on the left, 99th Brigade in Divisional Reserve.

There were three objectives, Violet, Green and Yellow lines, the first two forming the first phase of the attack and the third the second phase.

Of the 5th Infantry Brigade the 2nd Highland Light Infantry were attacking on the right, 24th Royal Fusiliers on the left; the 17th Royal Fusiliers were right-support battalion and the

¹ Official despatches.

2nd Oxford and Bucks left-support battalion. The Highland Light Infantry and 24th Royal Fusiliers were to capture the Violet and Green Lines and the 17th Royal Fusiliers and 2nd Oxford and Bucks the Yellow Line.

On the 11th the final period of bombardment began; it was terrific, 15-inch, 12-inch, 9.2-inch and 8-inch shells fell in torrents on the German lines and Serre was in flames. In retaliation the Bosche put down two heavy barrages on the White City and the Redan Ridge.

On the night of the 12th the assaulting troops began to move up to their assembly positions.

Patrols reported the enemy's trenches very much battered and No Man's Land in a frightful condition, inches thick in mud with gaping shell-holes and new craters full of water everywhere. The 'going' would be hazardous.

The Fusiliers left Mailly Wood at 10.15 p.m. The approach march was not easy. Each man carried 150 rounds of ammunition, two Mills bombs, two sandbags and iron ration, one extra day's ration with the unexpended portion of his daily ration, rifle, bayonet and equipment. Haversacks were carried on the back: they were marked by a piece of red material to facilitate aeroplane observation. About twenty men of each company carried picks and shovels for consolidation purposes. Over slippery ground, along muddy communication trenches, the load each

man carried was (to say the least of it) extremely trying.

Dispositions allotted to companies were as follows: B Company (Captain Ricketts) on the right, between Clive and Minden Trenches with the left flank resting on Fourth Avenue and right in touch with the 51st Division; D Company (Captain Hallows) right-support company; A Company (Captain Garret) left front, fifty yards west of Chatham Trench with the right on Fourth Avenue and left in touch with the 24th Royal Fusiliers; C Company (Captain Hole) left-support company.

Colonel Higgins had his Headquarters at the White City.

By 2.30 a.m. on the 13th all companies were in position ready for the assault. Zero hour was fixed at 5.45 a.m.

The night of the 12th/13th was extraordinarily quiet. Although expecting attack the enemy had no knowledge of the actual date; the prolonged bombardment to which he had been subjected appears to have been regarded by him as our usual 'hate'.

During the night a thick mist came on, and when dawn appeared a dense fog hung over the battlefield, making the keeping of direction extremely difficult.

Nevertheless the Highland Light Infantry and 24th Royal Fusiliers 'went over' punctually to

time and captured both their objectives, i.e. the Violet and Green Lines. They had followed so close (in places twenty yards only) on the heels of the barrage that they were into the German trenches ere the occupants had time to man them, many of the enemy being captured as they came up out of their dug-outs.

The first thing the 17th Royal Fusiliers report is the arrival of large numbers of German prisoners at about 6.30 a.m. Next (at 9 a.m.) that the Green Line had been captured. Upon receiving this information the C.O. moved his Battalion Headquarters up to the old German front line and companies advanced to go through to the Yellow Line.

What happened between 9 and 10 a.m. it is impossible to say, but apparently our barrage was falling (and was stationary) between the Green and Yellow Lines as the Fusiliers advanced, and that when it lifted it lifted for good. It was not until the guns had ceased firing that companies could advance.

By this time casualties were heavy. At 10 a.m. the situation is thus described in the Battalion diary: 'Green Line strongly held by mixed men of different units of 5th Brigade. Four companies of 17th Royal Fusiliers (total strength 180 men) east of the Green Line and holding Crater Lane and the trench running south-east from Point 26.'

On the left of the 5th Brigade the right of the 6th Brigade (13th Essex) had penetrated as far as the Green Line, though only the right of the Battalion had reached the objective; the left of the Battalion and the South Staffords, on their left, had reached the German front line but had become intermingled with troops of the 3rd Division (on the left of the 2nd). The fog was responsible, direction being almost impossible to maintain.

The failure of the 6th Brigade to get on (with the exception of the right of the Essex) had its effect upon the 5th Brigade, whose left was now enfiladed by the enemy with rifle and machine-gun fire.

Small parties of the 17th Royal Fusiliers had penetrated into Munich Trench, but were unable to maintain themselves there owing to a galling fire.

'The Germans were on top (of this trench) beckoning the attackers to come on,' said one of the Fusiliers. 'The latter on approaching nearer were met by heavy fire from their front and left flanks where it was seen that strong German forces were working their way down. In the meantime the only sign of the 6th Brigade was the arrival of a sergeant and about twenty men of the King's who reported that the rest of their Battalion had lost direction and were a good way to the left. The danger of becoming outflanked and the absence of any sign of support, neces-

sitated a retirement which the remnants of the Battalion carried out under cover of their machine guns which inflicted considerable loss on the enemy.'

At 10.30 a.m., after a reconnaissance by the C.O., the Battalion was disposed as follows: two companies in Crater Lane from 26 to Wagon Road, and two companies in the trench running from 26 to southern boundary of Brigade, crossing Wagon Road. Blocks and bombing posts were established at the junction of these trenches with the Wagon Road.

The Battalion diary states that 'this line was the furthest east held by any troops north of the Ancre.'

At 1.30 p.m. Colonel Higgins ordered two companies to hold the line of the Wagon Road in addition to the two other trenches. Tools, S.A.A. and bombs were then sent up to companies and consolidation proceeded rapidly. But at 4.30 p.m. companies reported that they were being counter-attacked and that the enemy was gradually working his way across their front towards Beaumont Hamel. The guns were informed and asked to put down a barrage which effectively checked the enemy's endeavours, for the attack fizzled out.

At midnight water and Very lights were sent up to companies.

With splendid tenacity the troops on the Green

Line had held their position all day. An orderly who arrived just after noon at 5th Brigade Headquarters, giving the position of troops in the front line, brought also this message: 'A cheerful spirit prevails in the Green Line.'

Dawn on the 14th broke also in a dense fog, and troops who had been detailed to attack Munich Trench experienced the greatest difficulty in reaching their forming-up positions in the Green Line. Deep mud, shell-holes mostly full of water, torn wire entanglements thrown about in terrible confusion, blown-in trenches full of mud up to the waist—all the chaos of positions newly captured, battered and scarred by artillery fire—added to the difficulty of keeping direction.

The attack on Munich Trench, as a whole, was a failure.

The Fusiliers made no move, but were shelled intermittently, consolidation proceeding throughout.

A good description of the condition of the line on the 14th of November was given by a young officer of the King's, sent out by his C.O. on a 'free-lance' reconnaissance, and as the area he describes was well known to the 17th Royal Fusiliers, his narrative is interesting:

'Started out over top to White City. Great changes here: two batteries have moved up within twenty yards of the Headquarters and the whole place is being shelled beyond recogni-

tion. The artillery have had two guns knocked out since 9 a.m. this morning and do not dare to fire more than three rounds from any one gun. The place is strewn with dead Bosche and a great number of horses: it was used on the first day as a collecting station for prisoners, and many were killed by their own people's fire. . . . Went up Fourth Avenue to point near our original front line.' (There was a hostile barrage on.) 'The fire was most intense and accurate so took to earth in half-finished dug-out shaft. After short wait, as there was no sign of barrage lifting and heavier stuff seemed to be coming, we decided to make a dash for it—across an open five hundred yards to Bosche front line; very heavy going and an extremely "hairy" time all round.

'Reached Bosche line a little to the left of Beaumont Hamel; all that is left of the latter seems to be two odd tree stumps and a bit of brick wall. Enemy lines very much battered and in worse state as regards mud than our own: quite impossible to walk along them without sticking or losing boots and puttees. Found Headquarters (5th Brigade) in one of front-line dug-outs, about thirty feet deep and a clear five hundred yards in length under front-line parapet. Accommodation is provided for about four hundred men: dormitories, mess rooms, bath places and separate rooms for the officers and N.C.O.'s. Officers' quarters most luxurious, provided with great quantities of wine, cigars, beer and soda-water. Got little information from H.L.I., but was referred to Headquarters of Fusiliers. Went north along front line to Headquarters of latter where information was more definite.'

He then describes an attack by the Warwicks, but that does not concern the Fusiliers as they were not involved.

On the 15th another attack by troops of a neighbouring division was made on Munich Trench, but failed. During the afternoon and

evening the 17th were again heavily shelled. When darkness had fallen the Battalion was relieved and moved back to the right sub-sector of the Brigade front in the old British front line.

The objective gained by the attacking troops of the 5th Brigade in this battle were of the greatest importance, for from the positions held by battalions it was possible to protect the left flank of the division on the right which assaulted and captured not only Beaumont Hamel but Beaucourt also and the southern end of the Beaucourt Spur, securing command of the Ancre valley on both sides.

The Battle of the Ancre, 1916, ended on the 18th of November, but with the exception of one day in the old British front line in the Redan sector, where the Battalion collected salvage and supplied burial parties, the 17th Royal Fusiliers were not again engaged in the operations.

Casualties had again been heavy: 33 other ranks were killed, 7 officers (Lieutenant E. P. Hallowes, 2nd Lieutenants K. W. Hamilton, G. C. Leven, C. W. Taylor, R. Davison, R. Pearce and H. J. Riches)¹ and 125 other ranks were wounded and 22 other ranks missing.

¹ An amusing incident concerning one of the officers wounded in the 'rear' was told of a stretcher-bearer detailed to take the wounded officer to the Advance Dressing Station: he returned within three minutes reporting that he had to return, being unable to keep up with this wounded officer.

CHAPTER VII
THE VALLEY OF MUD
MIRAUMONT, GREVILLERS, LOUPART WOOD

DURING the 16th and 17th of November the 2nd Division was relieved by the 32nd Division and moved back out of the forward area for rest and training. By the 27th the Division was located in the Brailly area, and there settled down to train, re-fit, and get whatever rest was possible after the exhausting struggles through which all ranks had passed.

The 17th Royal Fusiliers moved to billets in Mailly-Maillet—now a familiar place to the Battalion. But the 18th saw them on the march again, and for several days, until the 27th, they moved from place to place (marching in all some sixty to seventy miles) until they finally came to rest in Maison Ponthieu.

On the 6th of December Brig.-General Bullen-Smith went home on leave and Lieut.-Colonel Higgins assumed temporary command of the 5th Brigade while Major Turner took command of the Battalion.

Generally, December was an uneventful month. On Christmas Day all companies had really wonderful dinners, supplied mostly (though supplemented by gifts from friends of the Battalion in England) from Battalion Canteen Funds.

On the 27th the 2nd Division had a new G.O.C., Major-General C. E. Pereira¹ taking over command *vice* Major-General W. G. Walker, V.C.

The 9th of January, 1917, saw the Fusiliers on the march to Gezaincourt, the 2nd Division being then *en route* back to the front line. On the 11th the Division reached the Marieux area (the 17th billeting in Val de Maison) and the 12th and 13th were spent in moving up to take over the Courcellette sector from the 51st Division.

The general situation in the northern area of the Somme as the 2nd Division moved forward was as follows:

‘At the conclusion of the operations of the 13th of November and the following days, the enemy still held the whole of the Ancre Valley from Le Transloy to Grandcourt and his first line of defence lay along the lower northern slopes of the Thiepval Ridge. North of the Ancre he still held the greater part of the spur above Beaumont Hamel. Beyond that point the original German line, in which the enemy had established himself two years previously, ran past Serre, Gommecourt and Monchy au Bois to the northern slopes of the main watershed,

¹ Now Major-General Sir C. E. Pereira, K.C.B., C.M.G.

and thence north-east down to the valley of the River Scarpe east of Arras.

'Besides the positions held by him on our immediate front, and in addition to the fortified villages of the Ancre Valley with their connecting trenches, the enemy had prepared along the forward crest of the ridge, north of the Ancre Valley, a strong second system of defence. This consisted of a double line of trenches, heavily wired, and ran north-west from Saillisel past Le Transloy to the Albert-Bapaume road where it turned west past Grevillers and Loupart Wood and then north-west again past Achiet-le-Petit to Bucquoy. This system, which was known as the Le Transloy-Loupart Line, both by reason of its situation and as a result of the skill and industry expended on its preparation, constituted an exceedingly strong natural defensive position, second only to that from which the enemy had recently been driven on the Morval-Thiepval Ridge. Parallel to this line, but on the far side of the crest, he had constructed towards the close of the past year a third defensive system on the line Rocquigny-Bapaume-Ablainzeville.

'The first object of our operations in the Ancre Valley was to advance our trenches to within assaulting distance of the Le Transloy-Loupart Line.'¹

The last paragraph outlines the operations in which the 17th Royal Fusiliers, as part of the 2nd Division, were to be engaged during the next few weeks.

The 5th Infantry Brigade went first into the front-line trenches, relieving the 154th Brigade of the 51st Division between Le Sars and Grandcourt. The relief was carried out during the nights 12th/13th and 13th/14th of January. The 17th Royal Fusiliers were in reserve, two

¹ From official despatches by Sir Douglas Haig.

companies in Ovillers Huts and two in Wolseley Huts, near Ovillers-la-Boisselle, the 24th Royal Fusiliers and 2nd Highland Light Infantry taking over the front line with the 2nd Oxford and Bucks in support.

On the 16th, however, the Fusiliers moved up to relieve the Highland Light Infantry.

The new Divisional sector was very unlike the Beaumont Hamel-Hebuterne line. In the latter, though in many places water-logged and deep in mud, trenches *did* exist, but in the Courcellette sector the front line consisted of 'posts' which, to describe adequately, is almost beyond human power. The only written description available is in General Pereira's private diary, and there he says:

'The frontage is 2,500 yards, and the right of our line is about 1,000 yards west of Le Sars, the left a mile south of the eastern edge of Miraumont, Pys being about 1,200 yards north of the centre of our line.

'The first line consists of eighteen disconnected posts and platoons in close support—total ten platoons. Behind them there is nothing until one reaches the dug-outs in the West Miraumont road and just north of Courcellette where there are three platoons. There are three platoons in Courcellette, two companies west and two south of it: total two battalions. Ironside Avenue runs forward eight hundred yards from the West Miraumont road. That is the sole communication trench forward. There are brushwood tracks too, near the front line, but they can only be used at night.'

The Fusiliers had arrived at Ovillers on the

13th where two days were spent before the Battalion relieved the 2nd Highland Light Infantry in the front line on the night of the 16th/17th of January.

Immediately south-west of Pozieres there was a gum-boot store where guides met the relieving troops and led them forward, after they had drawn gum boots, up the Albert-Bapaume road, thence, skirting the western end of Courcellette, to the front line. The main communication trench was Ironside Avenue, but it was in such a shocking state as to be quite impassable. Tracks to the posts were built up of brushwood, but these also were in a bad state of repair. A and B Companies went first into the front line, i.e. posts, while C and D remained in support. The 'line' was wildly irregular, at one point (south of Pys) jutting out like a mountainous peak, at another (the extreme right of the Divisional front) resembling a deep dent, semi-circular in shape. None of the posts could boast adequate head-cover until the brigades not in the line furnished large working parties when, by much clearing, boarding, pumping and deepening, the defences soon began to show a very marked improvement. The Bosche, however, was on the alert, and little movement in the forward area was possible during the daylight hours.

The Bosche trenches were similarly irregular, and, south of Pys, No Man's Land was very

broad, though on the right and left of the Divisional front the opposing lines were much closer together.

The left of the line (which was the sector taken over by the Fusiliers) stood upon slightly higher ground than the right, for into the right sub-sector ran the Dyke road from Courcelette alongside which there was a ditch marked on the map as 'usually dry'; there *were* times when it was otherwise!

During the relief on the night of the 16th/17th four men were wounded, but beyond that incident the diary of the Fusiliers is silent as to details of the relieving operations.

The weather was terrible: bitterly cold, and on the 17th snow fell heavily. Whilst it lay upon the ground (for a considerable time) movement became even less possible. Imagine, therefore, the lot of the garrisons of that line of dismal posts, crouching in their wretched shell-holes, shivering, without a chance of warming themselves during the long hours of their watch. Ration parties only moved up at night, and they did so under the greatest difficulties, for the duckboard tracks were well known to the enemy whose artillery had marked them down; and, as in the nature of things reliefs, ration parties, etc., had to move forward along the only existing tracks, the enemy's artillery was always active when he knew battalions were taking over the line and

bearers of food were wending their painful way to the front line.

C and D Companies relieved A and B on the night of the 18th, and during the relief Lieutenant W. W. Edwards and three more other ranks were wounded; Lieutenant Edwards died of his wounds on the 22nd of January. On the 20th the Battalion was relieved and marched back to Bouzin-court, arriving at 4 a.m. on the 21st.

The usual thing took place on reaching Bouzin-court—first a good ‘clean up’, the mud and filth of the front line was scraped off, baths were in full swing, and a couple of days was usually sufficient to restore the Battalion to that state which, in the Army at least, is looked upon as being next to Godliness.

Colonel Higgins returned from leave on the 25th and once more assumed command of the Battalion.

Hard frost now covered the ground which, in that the ground was harder, made life more bearable, providing it was possible to beg, borrow or ‘scrounge’ fuel to keep the fires burning. But for working parties it was ‘hard going’.

A move to Bruce Huts took place on the afternoon of the 28th. The frost still continued, when the following day the Fusiliers began to furnish day and night working parties. By the end of January the Divisional area began to take on a far different appearance, though even yet

there was much to be done to make the communications with the front line anything like decent; until the 29th, when aeroplane photographs of the sector had been taken, printed and delivered at Divisional Headquarters, no one knew for certain the actual position of the front-line posts. An extraordinary thing to relate.

'It was not until we got these photographs', states General Pereira, 'that we had an accurate knowledge where our front-line posts really were.'

Reliefs often failed to find the posts they were to relieve.

February found the Fusiliers still at Bruce Huts, supplying working parties. Digging was difficult, but there was much 'carrying' to do for already offensive operations had been mooted. The month opened fine with the ground frozen hard. During the morning and afternoon of the 4th hostile aeroplanes dropped bombs near Bruce Huts, but there are no records of casualties among the Fusiliers.

On the night of the 5th the Battalion again took over the front line; on this occasion the enemy's guns were busy during the relief (as they invariably were at night-time) and 2 other ranks were killed and 3 wounded. On the 7th there was more shelling and another man was killed and 1 wounded. Relief came on the 9th, and the

Fusiliers marched back to Wolfe Huts: they were to raid the enemy on the following night.

On the 3rd the 1st Royal Berks (99th Brigade) had raided the Bosche and had returned with 2 officers and 49 other ranks as prisoners. The Fusiliers were hoping to do better, for the spirit of rivalry between Battalions (a healthy sign) was always prevalent.

Orders for the raid had been issued from 5th Brigade Headquarters on the 9th of February.

The raid was to be carried out by 2 officers and 30 other ranks, and the objectives were 'that portion of Desire Support Trench for a distance of two hundred yards south of sap at R.12.C.95.15' (there is no way of describing it other than in co-ordinates) and the sap itself. The raiders were to inflict damage on the enemy, secure identifications and prisoners, bomb dug-outs and capture hostile machine guns. There was to be no previous artillery bombardment: the guns were to put a box barrage on a portion of the enemy's trenches further east to mislead him as to the actual point of the raid.

The raiding party was to form up in the front line between Posts 9 and 10, and at zero the guns were to open intense fire on the objective for three minutes, then lift to the Pys road during which time the raiders would have entered the enemy's trenches.

The raiding force was to be divided into three

parties, i.e. No. 1, 2nd Lieutenant Antill and 16 other ranks; No. 2, Sergeant Norrington and 6 other ranks; No. 3, Lieutenant Joelson and 10 other ranks.

There was a gap in the enemy's wire about thirty yards south-east of the junction of the hostile sap with Desire Support Trench: this was the point of entry for the raiders. Having entered the enemy's trenches, special parties (all having been trained in their duties) were to form blocks on both flanks, deal with the garrison of the left sap, bomb dug-outs and collect identifications. In addition to the 30 other ranks taking part in the raid, a Lewis-gun team was to be posted on either flank of the raiders to prevent hostile posts in the neighbourhood from rendering assistance to the garrison of the sap.

Ten minutes was the time allowed for the raiding operations.

The two officers selected for the raid were Lieutenant S. H. Joelson (O.C. raid) and 2nd Lieutenant S. Antill. On a call for raiders among 'other ranks' more volunteered than could be taken, as every one was keen on the raid. However, the party was finally selected.

We were now in the third year of the War and raids were much more scientific and more carefully planned than when they first began early in 1915. At that period they were somewhat rough and ready—there were no such things as

box barrages or creeping barrages, indeed at that time the word 'barrage' hardly existed at all, being known as a curtain of fire. But now, in 1917, raiding had almost reached the 'high art' stage.

Snow was still on the ground, and in order to make the raiders as inconspicuous as possible Brigade Headquarters issued the following orders: 'White suits will be worn by the raiding party and helmets, rifles, bludgeons, etc., will also be covered with white material.' Fifty per cent of the raiders were to carry rifles and bayonets, the remainder revolvers and bludgeons. Every man was to carry four bombs in his pocket and at least 30 per cent wire-cutters.

Lieutenant Joelson personally reconnoitred the enemy's wire before the raid which was to take place at 8.5 p.m. on the 10th of February.

At zero hour the raiders went over 'looking', as the O.C. raid said, 'like nothing on God's earth': they wore white smocks over their uniforms.

'The operation was entirely successful, capturing seven prisoners and inflicting great loss on the enemy, Lieutenant Joelson¹ wounded, 6 other ranks wounded, 3 killed, 3 missing', such is the Fusiliers own story of the raid.

The raiders then returned to Wolfe Huts, but on the night of the 11th a party was sent out

¹ Subsequently awarded the Military Cross.

in the hope of finding the missing men, without success.¹

On the 12th the enemy raided the Highland Light Infantry who had taken over the front line from the Fusiliers, but information concerning the coming raid had been given by one of the prisoners captured by the Fusiliers. This Bosche raid is thus described by the G.O.C. Division, from information given by a wounded prisoner taken by the Highland Light Infantry.

'A prisoner captured in our raid of the 10th of February gave us some interesting information of an intended raid by the 90th Regiment, which was to come off either to-night or to-morrow. There were seventy volunteers from all three battalions,² and they were to attack near our No. 10 Post. We wired up the 5th Brigade and an artillery barrage was ready waiting for them. About 9.15 the raid started, and the earliest report stated that it had been dealt with successfully. One Lewis-gun and team are missing. We have buried five Bosche and have sent back three wounded. There was such heavy sniping that it was not possible to make any search in No Man's Land, but a considerable number of prisoners are claimed. A wounded prisoner states that the Bosche got away with two prisoners, that the officer commanding the raid was shot and carried back by his men; the strength of the party—seventy, their orders to remain in our trench fifteen minutes, capture prisoners and return; he said the raid was a failure.'

¹ One of the missing men was Private Campbell of C Company. From German sources it was afterwards learned that Campbell was severely wounded and died in German hands.

² A German infantry regiment consisted of three battalions.

The Bosche also wore white clothes in the above raid.

On the 13th the Fusiliers went back into the front line and relieved the Highland Light Infantry, two companies in the line, two in support dug-outs. The following day the enemy's artillery was again active and four men were wounded. On this date also, at least a dozen dead Germans were discovered lying out in No Man's Land, evidently caught in the barrage put down on the night they attempted to raid the Highland Light Infantry.

Relief came on the 15th when the Berkshires and King's took over the line, the Fusiliers marching back to Bouzincourt. During the evening of the 16th the Battalion moved again to Ovillers Huts.

THE ACTION OF MIRAUMONT, 17TH-18TH FEBRUARY

On the 17th of February the 6th and 99th Brigades attacked the enemy, the 5th Brigade being in Divisional Reserve.

In conjunction with the 18th Division, on the left, the 2nd Division had been ordered to capture a line running from the East Miraumont to the West Miraumont road, the first objective being Grandcourt Trench and the second objective South Miraumont Trench; this was the main attack to be carried out by the 99th Brigade. A

subsidiary attack by the 6th Brigade was to take place on the right.

As already stated, the 17th Royal Fusiliers were at Owillers Huts, and, though under two hours' notice to move, were not called upon.

The 99th Brigade captured the first objective and consolidated the line, but the 6th Brigade failed to make headway. The enemy had obtained information of the attack on this flank and was able to beat off the attackers.

Rain fell heavily on the 17th and mist covered the battlefield.

On the 23rd the Fusiliers returned to the front line, relieving the 17th Middlesex in the Courcellette sector. The relief was completed at 1 a.m. on the 24th, 3 other ranks being killed and 5 wounded during the taking-over operations.

Since the Fusiliers were in the front line a great change had come over the conditions. The hard frost had given way under warmer weather, heavy rain had fallen and the mud was appalling.

The Brigadier of the 6th Brigade, on sending in his report after handing over the sector to Brig.-General Bullen-Smith, said: 'The right platoon is in what must be described as a bog, the ground being so false that about ten men or more had to be dug out and pulled out with beams and ropes . . . the enemy is within thirty yards of our front posts.'

Conceivably the 17th took over the left sub-

sector of the Brigade front, i.e. Graincourt Trench, which had been captured while they were out of the line, for on the 25th the Brigade diary records that at about 2.15 a.m. on the 25th the Battalion 'commenced pushing forward posts on left towards Crest Trench'.

Crest Trench lay about half-way between Grandcourt and South Miraumont Trenches; it ran along the southern edge of a rise in the ground known as Hill 130. The latter had been marked down for early capture and plans had already been made for the operations. On the right of the Fusiliers the 2nd Oxford and Bucks had occupied Coulee Trench, also without opposition.

This advance was over ground of the most abominable character: the men had all they could do to prevent themselves sinking into the viscous mud.

Then all of a sudden a startling change came over the situation: a report had been received at 2nd Divisional Headquarters from the 18th Division that patrols of the latter, pushing forward as far as Miraumont, found that the enemy had evacuated his position; the 18th had also occupied South Miraumont Trench along its front. By 10 a.m. the 5th Brigade, with the Australians on the right and 18th Division on the left, was advancing in a north-easterly direction; the 2nd Highland Light Infantry (the supporting

battalion of the 5th Brigade) had been ordered to establish themselves in Below Trench, south of Pys, with protective flanks thrown out to the southern exits of Pys and Grundy Trench.

THE GERMAN RETREAT TO THE HINDENBURG LINE

Although the official dates of the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line are 14th of March to 5th of April, it is perfectly obvious from the above narrative that the enemy began to evacuate his trenches towards the end of February. The date given in German orders for the Retreat to begin was the 16th of March, but it was qualified by the statement that 'under enemy pressure' (the Retreat) 'might start at any earlier date'. Certainly in front of the 2nd Division the Bosche began to evacuate his trenches on the 25th of February.

Briefly, the enemy's losses had been so heavy in 1916 that early in 1917 he found it necessary to shorten his line. On the 9th of February, therefore, he began the work of demolition over an area of fifteen kilometres in breadth, in the huge salient he occupied between Soissons and Arras. Simultaneously with the work of demolition, he was preparing a new strong system of defence, to be known as the Hindenburg Line, which ran from the northern bank of the Aisne, just east of Crouy, northwards, west of La Fere, west of St.

Quentin, thence in a north-westerly direction to the southern bank of the Scarpe, east of Arras.

'The decision to retreat', said General Ludendorff, 'was not reached without a painful struggle. It implied a confession of weakness bound to raise the *morale* of the enemy and lower our own. But as it was necessary for military reasons we had no choice, it had to be carried out.'

The significance of this statement, so far as the 17th Royal Fusiliers were concerned, is this: the Battalion had lost many gallant officers and men on the Somme battlefields of the previous year. As the records show, their casualties were heavy. But in the above confession by the Chief of the German General Staff lies the justification for those bloody battles of 1916, when at times the struggle seemed hopeless and to no purpose. They had *not* died in vain—those brave souls who had given their lives at Delville Wood or on the Ancre.

The German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line in 1917 was one of the results of the Somme Battles of 1916.

The G.O.C., 2nd Division, gives the approximate positions along the Divisional front on the morning of the 26th thus:

'The Highland Light Infantry are established up against the Bosche who are holding Grevillers Trench, and are in touch with the 2nd Australians on their right. The 17th Royal Fusiliers are in support in Below Trench and are in touch with

the 18th Division on the left. Some of the 52nd are in support on the right and in touch with the Anzacs and so all is well. The battalions all got sorted out last night: they are in fairly good trenches and have got some excellent dug-outs.'

The situation of the dug-outs in which the Fusiliers were accommodated is unknown, but Battalion Headquarters is thus described by J. A. Beale, who at that period was Lewis-Gun Sergeant. He said:

'When Battalion Headquarters first moved forward from the big dug-out at Miraumont, which we had occupied since the beginning of our tour in this sector, I was detailed to accompany the C.O. (Colonel Higgins) when he went forward to new headquarters. We went straight up the Miraumont-Pys road, through our front line and eventually established advanced headquarters in a dug-out which had but recently been in German occupation.

'On our way up we passed a number of little groups of British dead—most were so silted over with mud that it was difficult at a glance to determine what they were exactly, but fairly obviously casualties of the 99th Brigade's operations a week or two previously. What was noteworthy was that each little group was in the middle of an obviously arranged gap where the belts of German wire crossed the road. There were, as far as we could see, practically no isolated casualties apart from those little groups in the gaps, none even in the wire itself.

'When we arrived at the German dug-out which was to be the new headquarters, it appeared to be very low—it was impossible for even a small man to stand upright: about 4 feet 6 inches floor to ceiling. It also stank abominably. When a little later we were joined by a few signallers we got to work to clean up a little; the more filth we dug from the floor the more there seemed to be below. By the time we'd finished the dug-out

was 6 inches to 9 inches appreciably deeper. It was very obvious from the accumulation we dug out that the late German occupants had rarely, if ever, visited the outer air for any purpose whatever between their arrival and their final scuttle rearwards.

'Most German dug-outs were a little "fruity"—some very much so—but this one was really an outstanding example of German "thoroughness".'

The foregoing is possibly not very pertinent to the German retirement, but may serve to show the conditions under which men lived in the Miraumont sector during the months previous. No movement whatever was possible during daylight between Battalion Headquarters and the front line, and very little even rearwards between Battalion and Brigade Headquarters.

'At a chance encounter a few weeks later on the Arras front I learned that I had spent the best part of the winter in the big Miraumont dug-out a few hundred yards in front of my eldest brother, who had been with a Horse Artillery battery—Army Troops—during the whole of the same period. I knew there was an 18-pounder battery very little in rear of our Headquarters dug-out—we heard quite a lot of it. On any other sector I should most certainly, during my daily comings and goings, have discovered it as a horse battery and made inquiries.'

It was in this sector that an entire post, held by a section or so of A Company, was lost for two or three nights. It was a little in rear of the front line and was only eventually found by an extended line of thirty or forty men guided by

Captain Lavarack, marching on a compass bearing across country. Several search parties sent out previously had failed to locate it, and had themselves narrowly escaped losing themselves into the bargain. The sergeant in charge of that post, when eventually found, stated that he and his party had heard the shouts of the search parties calling his name for two nights, but not being very sure of his proximity to the Germans had suspected Hunnish trickery and had forbidden his men to answer in reply.

The enemy's guns were busy on the 26th and the Fusiliers had three men wounded. The next night the Battalion was relieved in the front line by the 24th Royal Fusiliers and moved back to the support dug-outs, two companies in Courcellette dug-outs and two in the Chalk Mounds. In these positions they remained until the 3rd of March. Working parties were supplied day and night, for communications were difficult and roads and tracks had to be cleared. On the 1st of March Major R. Turner left the Battalion to assume command of the 6th Northants.

There is no information available of the nature of the work on which the Fusiliers were engaged during the remainder of the time they, with other battalions of the 5th Brigade, were in reserve.

They marched back to billets in Albert on the 3rd, having been relieved by the 22nd Royal Fusiliers, Battalion Headquarters moving to

Wolfe Huts. From this date onwards until the 20th of March (when the 2nd Division, having been squeezed out of the line by the rapid and converging advance of the flanking divisions, moved back out of the line) the Fusiliers supplied working parties, though changing their localities on two or three occasions.

Everywhere along the whole line the enemy was followed up rapidly to the Hindenburg Line, but owing to the destruction of roads and tracks, the prevalence of mud, and the awful conditions of the 'going' generally, large working parties had to be provided by all divisions in order to build up communications over which the guns could be moved forward. The 2nd Division had attacked and captured Grevillers Trench on the 10th of March; this was followed by the occupation of Loupart Trench and Wood on the 13th. On the 11th the Fusiliers had moved from Albert to Ovillers Huts, and again their diary records 'working parties supplied'. They were probably engaged in clearing the roads of mud and rebuilding them, for during the afternoon and night of the 13th and the early hours of the 14th the Divisional reports state that working parties of infantry, sappers and pioneers were hard at work preparing tracks over which the artillery could move forward. The following extract from a gunner's diary of the 2nd Divisional Artillery gives some idea of the awful conditions

in the Valley of Mud, as the country road about Miraumont and Pys might well be called:

'Started off with the guns at about 9.30 a.m. (14th) over the most appalling bit of road up to Aqueduct road. A and B were coming up, but we only managed to get A up there eventually. I rode up to the position and started the men off working, digging dug-outs off a new trench, and then returned to find the gun in a large 9·2 inch hole just about the Aqueduct road. We took half-an-hour getting it out, and also pulling the cook's cart out of difficulties, and then soon after landed in another. Another half-an-hour's work. Then over a track bridge, over some appalling mud through which the ten-horse teams were pulling the gun almost axle deep, and finally came to rest over the second track bridge, with the limber hanging over the side, one horse down on the bridge, another both wheelers in the ditch, all tied up in their harness with their legs in the air.'

There is more of this graphic description of the conditions, but sufficient has been given to show the nature of the 'going' where the Fusiliers were at work.

On the 15th the Battalion moved to Courcellette and there pitched camp; for several days they were to occupy tents. On the 16th Captain A. Howard was wounded. On the 19th the Fusiliers marched back again to Ovillers Huts.

By this date the II. Corps, to which the 2nd Division belonged, had been squeezed out of the line by the Anzac and V. Corps, and the 5th Brigade was at Ovillers and Wolfe Huts, the 6th

Brigade in Corps Support, holding the Bihucourt Line and Courcellette, the 99th Brigade in Albert.

These dispositions were, however, only temporary, for the 2nd Division had been transferred from the II. to the Canadian Corps and had been ordered to move north to the Arras front, though all ranks were hoping for a short rest out of the line before taking over a front-line sector.

The 17th Royal Fusiliers moved first to Hedauville on the 21st of March, then to Rubempre (where Lieut.-Colonel Higgins left to take temporary command of the 5th Brigade, leaving Captain S. J. M. Hole to command the Battalion) on the 24th, to Gezaincourt on the 26th, thence to Nuncq (27th), Croix (29th), and, finally, Pernes on the 30th, where they billeted.

CHAPTER VIII

ARRAS, 1917

THE German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line did not seriously affect the Allied plan of campaign for 1917, which comprised 'a series of offensives on all fronts so timed as to assist each other by depriving the enemy of the power of weakening any one of his fronts in order to reinforce another'.

In France and Flanders the first offensive of the year planned to take place on the British front was against the enemy's troops occupying the salient between the Scarpe and the Ancre, into which they had been pressed as a result of the Somme Battles of 1916. Both shoulders of the salient were to be attacked, i.e. by the Fifth Army on the Ancre and the Third Army from the north-west about Arras, to include the Vimy Ridge, the possession of which was necessary to secure the left flank of the operations on the southern bank of the Scarpe.

In these operations (The Battles of Arras, 1917) the 2nd Division was involved.

On the 1st of April the 17th Royal Fusiliers, having marched from Pernes, were billeted in Croix, the men's billets being very poor with leaky roofs and little adapted to keep out snow and rain, which fell periodically.

In this place training took the form of lectures to officers and simple schemes dealing with open warfare 'which', states the Battalion diary, 'we were assured would be in full swing shortly'. Thus were the Fusiliers informed that they would very soon be again in the front line of battle.

On the 1st an outpost and advanced-guard scheme was carried out, and march discipline was discussed on the way to and from the training area. But snow put an end to the day's training and the Battalion returned to its miserable billets in Croix.

On the 2nd, Major R. J. Brett, 2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, took over the duties of second in command *vice* Major R. Turner, appointed to command the 6th Northants.

The 6th was Good Friday and training was suspended to enable the men to attend Church Parade.

The following day 5th Brigade Headquarters issued orders to move to the Frevillers area. The Fusiliers paraded at 3 p.m. on the 8th (Easter Sunday) and set out for their new destination, where, to every one's satisfaction, good billets were obtained.

April the 9th—Easter Monday—saw the beginning of the Arras Offensive when at 5.30 a.m., under a most effective artillery barrage, the Canadian Corps swept up and over the Vimy Ridge and captured practically the whole of it, while on their right as far south as the Scarpe, Fampoux was taken and south of the river our line was pushed forward deeply into the enemy's trench systems.

The particular sector of the line of interest to the 17th Royal Fusiliers was that which lay across the southern end of the Vimy Ridge, due east towards Bailleul and Oppy, where the 51st Division had wrested from the enemy his front and second trench systems. It was this sector of the line which the 2nd Division was destined to take over on the night of the 11th/12th of April.

On the 9th the Fusiliers rested and billeted. In the afternoon there was a football match. Snow fell heavily during the day: it was strange how during the years of the War the elements so often conspired against us whenever we began an offensive!

On the 10th orders came to move forward, and the Battalion, in a heavy snowstorm, marched to Maroeuil, where broken-down houses, battered by shell-fire, were the only shelters which could be provided.

At 10.30 p.m. that night orders were received

Dawn broke on the 17th Royal Fusiliers holding the old German support line. During the day they were ordered to send a carrying party up to the 24th Royal Fusiliers, who were holding the Sugar Factory. The hour is not given, but it was probably during the afternoon, for earlier a patrol of Rifles from the 99th Brigade (on the right of the 5th Brigade) had entered Bailleul (which on the previous night was held by the Bosche with machine guns) and found it clear of the enemy; the 99th Brigade had immediately pushed forward its line, while on the left the 5th Brigade had acted similarly, occupying the Sugar Factory.¹

But the carrying party of the Fusiliers did not get through unscathed, for there is a note in the Battalion diary which says: 'One of the first military principles, i.e. that of concealment from view, seems to have been forgotten.' The party, led by a young and inexperienced officer, had walked over the skyline west of Bailleul in close formation. The Bosche 'spotted' the party and opened fire with his guns, and 2nd Lieutenant R. A. Fergusson (6th Battalion, attached 17th) was killed. The diary adds the following

¹ 'Both Brigades continued their advances during the afternoon and got well beyond Bailleul and the Sugar Factory and each captured a gun; there was some opposition from machine guns and some shelling. We were sent some excellent intelligence reports.'—G.O.C., 2nd Division.

pathetic note: 'Unfortunately it was the first and last shell he ever saw.'

On the 14th the Fusiliers moved forward to the Brown (or Farbus) Line, which was the old German reserve line. Colonel Higgins' Headquarters and one company were in Tommy Trench. The Battalion was shelled during the day and suffered a few casualties.

By this date the 6th Brigade had secured a hill east of Bailleul known as 'Hill 80', which overlooked the Gavrelle-Oppy Line. The 5th Brigade was slightly in the left rear. As patrols gained ground so battalions were gradually being pushed forward. Brigadiers had received orders to establish their troops right up against the Oppy Line. Behind the front line the guns were gradually being brought up, and those which had already reached their allotted positions were already engaged in wire-cutting, for the entanglements in front of the Oppy Line were of a formidable character.

On the 15th the Fusiliers made another move forward, on this occasion to the 'so-called' front line, which at this period (since it had but recently been occupied) was of a distinctly sketchy nature: it consisted of a few posts on either side of the Arras-Arleux road and about 1,000 yards from the Oppy Line.

The Oppy Line, which was in reality a switch line from the Hindenburg Line south of the

to move up, the 2nd Division was to relieve the 51st Division which held a line running from a point on the railway, about 1,000 yards south-west of Bailleul, to a point in a sunken road some 500 yards south-east of Commandant's House; the 5th Brigade was to take over the left sub-sector, the 99th Brigade the right.

In rear of the new Divisional front line the ground between the latter and the old British front line, east and north of Roclincourt, was a maze of trenches and wire. The right boundary of the 5th Brigade was a long communication trench—Zenner Weg. Thence, northwards to the left brigade (and Divisional) boundary and in the order given, were the following communication trenches—Ouse, Tommy, Tired, Toast, the latter leading to the point on the sunken road south-east of Commandant's House. The front line of the left sub-sector consisted of two heavily-wired trenches (wired of course on the west since there had been no time to put out wire on the eastern side) of the Point du Jour-Farbus Line; on the right sub-sector there was only one single trench. Bailleul lay some 1,400 yards due east of the junction of the two sub-sectors, while just over 2,000 yards north-east of the village was Oppy Wood and Village. Other features in the neighbourhood were a sugar factory about 900 yards north of Bailleul, and the Arras railway line; sunken roads ran in all directions. The

Divisional area was on the southern and lower slopes of the Vimy Ridge, and, excepting for the front line and a short length of trench on the top of the crest, was free from observation by the enemy.

On taking over the line the 17th Royal Fusiliers were to remain in the old German system, while the 24th Royal Fusiliers took over the front system as far west as Tommy Trench; the 2nd Oxford and Bucks from Tommy Trench (exclusive) to Kleenan Stellung, and the 2nd Highland Light Infantry from the latter to Law-Leg-Posen Weg; thus the 5th Brigade was to be distributed in depth.

The relief took place in a blinding snowstorm, guides lost their way, and it was not completed until 6 a.m. on the 12th. Otherwise, so far as the 17th Royal Fusiliers were concerned, the 'taking over' was without incident. The Battalion spent the morning of the 12th in clearing up the battlefield in their area, burying British and German dead and in establishing a salvage dump: the G.O.C., 2nd Division, was a stern advocate for salving as much war material as possible, and as a consequence his Division had a high reputation for its salvage work.¹

¹ The salvage returns for all units of the 2nd Division for twenty days of March, 1917, amounted to £23,000. The total amount for the Division since the 18th of January, 1917, was £121,000. These figures give some idea of the extraordinary amount of wastage on the battlefield.

Scarpe, ran from the northern bank of the river past the western outskirts of Fampoux, Gavrelle, Oppy and Arleux. But from just above the northern edge of Oppy Wood, which lay west of the village, there was another switch line—the Oppy-Mericourt-Vendin Line, the southern portion of which was soon to become terribly familiar to the Fusiliers.

During the night of the 15th/16th the posts were strengthened, though under shell-fire, for the Bosche had no intention of allowing us to establish ourselves without making the operation as costly as possible.

Two companies were in the support line some 500 yards behind the posts.

‘Steady rain all day: perfectly damnable,’ records General Pereira of the 15th of April; one gets a good insight of what was going on generally in the Divisional area from his diary.

On the 16th the Battalion was ordered to make a daylight reconnaissance of the Oppy Line and Arleux. No doubt the ‘higher command’ had its reasons for making such a reconnaissance, but to do it in full view of the Bosche was surely unnecessarily risking the lives of 2nd Lieutenant Brodie, Corporal Town and the men who went out with him.

The reconnaissance started at about 3 p.m. The Bosche line was obviously held, and the party was sniped almost from the time they left the trench.

Second-Lieutenant Brodie was wounded, Corporal Town killed and one man was wounded and captured by the enemy; only one man returned safely.

The wire was thick and unbroken, but that fact might have been ascertained at night.

Just before 5 p.m. on the 16th orders were received from Brigade Headquarters for the Fusiliers to find three companies who, with the 2nd Oxford and Bucks on their right, were to establish themselves by means of bombing parties in the Oppy Line and Arleux Switch. But Brigade Headquarters were informed that the wire was uncut in front of the Bosche trenches, and under Divisional orders the attack was stopped. As previously, four separate brigades had endeavoured to do the same thing, but had failed to take the line, it was obviously fortunate that the operation was cancelled.

One man was killed and two were wounded.

On the 18th the 5th Brigade was relieved by the 6th Brigade and the 17th Royal Fusiliers moved back to the old British front line near Ecurie.

The old No Man's Land in the Vimy Ridge neighbourhood was a dreadful sight, littered not only with British and German dead but with fragments of the French dead killed some while previously. Skulls were everywhere, and the G.O.C. speaks of one

'still in its steel helmet, fragments of red breeches, thigh bones, boots, fragments of feet protruding from the latter; all these are

scattered about in great profusion. This remained No Man's Land for twenty-two months, the bodies have never been buried and had gone away to nothing'.

On the 20th, to every one's regret, Lieut.-Colonel C. G. Higgins, D.S.O., left the 17th Royal Fusiliers to command the 174th Brigade and was succeeded by Lieut.-Colonel S. V. P. Weston, D.S.O., M.C., who had been second in command of the 1st Royal Berkshires.

It may be interesting to their old comrades of the Battalion to see (from their own words) how these two officers regarded their appointments:

'I felt extremely elated,' said General Higgins. 'It was certainly one of the proudest moments of my life. I had always looked on the command of a brigade as one of the best commands in the Army in France, and now I was one of the very youngest brigadiers in the whole Army. I said "good-bye" to the 17th Royal Fusiliers with the greatest regret. I knew it was through them that I had really won my brigade.'

General Weston said:

'About midday I heard Captain Jerwood loudly beating a gong. Accustomed as I was to his buoyant spirits, I inquired if he was starting a war dance. He was acting Adjutant and had apparently got hold of the information that I was appointed to take command of the 17th Royal Fusiliers. Being, therefore, more of a philosopher than a soldier, I was astounded when Jerry, as we called Captain Jerwood, kept on repeating that I was to command the 17th Royal Fusiliers. So I replied, "Rubbish, Jerry, come and have lunch." However, it was true, and I had to report and take over command that very day.'

The loss of a C.O. who had endeared himself

to his men, as Colonel Higgins had done, was a serious blow to the Battalion, but Colonel Weston very soon found his way to the hearts of all ranks.

The Fusiliers moved to the old German reserve line on the 21st. On the morning of the 22nd of April, 5th Brigade Headquarters issued orders for the relief of the 6th Brigade during the night of the 22nd/23rd.

Names stir the memory and bring back recollections of places and incidents forgotten in the course of years. An extract from these relief orders will no doubt refresh the minds of readers and help them to revisualize scenes once familiar. The Brigade was to take over the left half of the Divisional front: 'Dividing line between brigades (the 99th was on the right) will be duck-board track (common to both Brigades)—junction of Zenner Weg with Pont du Jour-Farbus Line—Crucifix (both inclusive to 5th Infantry Brigade) western corner of Oppy Wood (B.18.b.3.5).' The 24th Royal Fusiliers were to take over the front-line system as far west as a line drawn north and south through the eastern edge of the Sugar Factory. The 17th Royal Fusiliers were to dig a line about 200 yards east of the railway which was to be held with one company by day, the three remaining companies being located west of the railway till the line was completed. The railway mentioned was the Lens-Arras line just west of Bailleul.

That night the Fusiliers moved up to the line north-west of Bailleul, and the Battalion began to dig a new main line of resistance 150 yards east of the railway. A trench was dug sufficient to accommodate one company which then occupied it, the remaining three companies moving back to just west of the railway. The following day the main line was further improved, A and D Companies being employed for that purpose. Throughout the day the Bosche shelled the front line intermittently. Again on the 24th the Battalion worked on the line, which on this date was linked up with similar lines dug on the right and left by the 99th Brigade and Canadians respectively.

The next day the Battalion was relieved and moved back to the Brown Line and Tommy Trench, where orders were received to prepare for an attack on the Oppy Line and Arleux Switch 'on a date to be notified later'.

It is a much-debated question as to whether regimental histories ought to contain discussions on higher tactics and strategy. But undoubtedly the narratives of many actions in which battalions were engaged lose their significance unless something is said as to why certain attacks were made and of the cause of success or failure.

So far as the British offensive was concerned on the Arras front, the objectives and results aimed at had been gained by the 14th of April,

i.e. five days after the beginning of the offensive on the 9th. But the French insisted that Sir Douglas Haig should go on attacking until they had made progress on the Aisne and in Champagne where all had not turned out as General Nivelle had anticipated.¹

The *raison d'être* of the Battle of Arleux (28th–29th April) is, therefore, thus given in Sir Douglas Haig's despatches:

'In order to assist our Allies I arranged that until their object had been attained, I would continue my operations at Arras . . . until such time as the results of the French offensive should have declared themselves.'

A grave commitment, seeing that the British Army was none too strong and that the heavy losses on the Somme in 1916 had not been fully made up.

The despatches then continue:

'The first of these attacks was delivered on the 28th of April on a front of about eight miles north of Monchy le Preux. With a view to economizing my troops, my objectives were shallow, and for a like reason, and also to give the appearance of an attack on a more imposing scale, demonstrations were continued southwards to the Arras-Cambrai road and northwards to the Souchez River.'

In operation orders issued on the 26th the 63rd Division was to attack on the right, from Gavrelle, the 2nd Division in the centre and the

¹ The French losses were so heavy that subsequently mutiny broke out in the French Army and Nivelle was suspended.

Canadians on the left. The 6th Brigade, on the right, and 5th Brigade, on the left, were to carry out the operations on the 2nd Division front.

Of the 5th Brigade the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the 2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry were to be right and left assaulting Battalions respectively: the duties of the 17th Royal Fusiliers, as laid down in Brigade operation orders, were threefold—(i) to detach two platoons to report to the 2nd Highland Light Infantry, and one company to report to the 2nd Oxford and Bucks, as 'moppers up' to the first objective; (ii) detail one platoon under an officer to construct strong points under R.E. supervision, i.e. two in the right battalion sector and three in the left battalion sector. The strong-point parties were to move sufficiently in rear of the assaulting troops to avoid being involved in the initial fighting, and were to go straight through to the points selected and begin work before the Royal Engineers arrived; (iii) detail two platoons with one officer for each of the assaulting Battalions, to act as carriers.

There were three objectives—Blue, Green and Brown Lines—but those on the 5th Brigade front need only be given. The first objective (Blue Line) was the front and support German trenches along the Brigade front, including the network of trenches north of Oppy Wood and the Crucifix; the Green Line lay some 300 to

400 yards east of the Blue Line; the Brown Line ran along Oppy Support trench, thence along the Mericourt-Vendin line to the south-eastern corner of the Wood south of Fresnoy.

The 'moppers up' were to form up behind and go forward with the first and second waves; the carriers were to act similarly behind the fourth wave.¹ Many pages of typed foolscap contain Divisional orders for the attack, but they cannot, obviously, be detailed.

At 11 p.m. on the 27th the 17th Royal Fusiliers moved up to their battle positions. A few casualties were suffered during this operation.

Zero hour was 4.25 a.m. on the 28th when the barrage fell and the troops moved forward to the attack. By the time they reached the German wire the enemy's machine guns had opened fire, while his artillery and 'Minnies' put down an intense barrage about 150 to 200 yards behind the British front line.

The first message to 5th Brigade Headquarters arrived at 5.30 a.m. It was from the right company of the Oxford and Bucks: 'My company has reached its objective . . . fifty prisoners taken. . . . Enemy made fair resistance. . . . I am in touch with 2nd Highland Light Infantry on my

¹ The Battalion diary of the 17th Royal Fusiliers states, 'See O.O.11,' but no operation orders are with the diary, nor do the Brigade or Divisional diaries contain copies of Colonel Weston's orders.

right and am in front of Canadians going towards Arleux.' But in the next message (timed 6.45 a.m.) touch had been lost with the Highland Light Infantry, though maintained with the Canadians. A wounded officer of the Oxford and Bucks then reported at 7.30 a.m. that he was of the opinion that his Battalion was 'over the Green Line'. He stated also that only one gap in the wire had been found and that the whole company had had to go through it.

Touch with the Highland Light Infantry seems to have been entirely lost until, at 1.35 p.m., Colonel Weston reported that his B Company had sent the following message: '2nd Highland Light Infantry have retired and joined us in the German front line. My right flank is in same position, but all communication with 6th Infantry Brigade has been lost. 6th Infantry Brigade appear to have retired from Oppy. We are being heavily shelled.'

This was correct; the 6th Brigade, after many gallant efforts, had established itself in Oppy Wood and Village, but the 63rd Division troops on the right, had not reached their objective, and the right flank of the 2nd Division being opened, the Bosche counter-attacked heavily and drove the first-mentioned Brigade back to the British front line. This retirement uncovered the right of the 2nd Highland Light Infantry who were forced to fall back to the Blue Line (first objective).

At about 2 p.m. German counter-attack troops had reached a trench running from north-west to south-east, north of Oppy, but there they were caught by machine-gun fire and shrapnel; some dropped into a trench, others fled back in disorder to Neuville, followed by our shrapnel.

Another attack, ordered for 7 p.m., did not materialize, and in the meanwhile the 6th Brigade had been relieved by the 99th Brigade.

The 17th Royal Fusiliers tell the following story of the attack on the 28th: .

'4.25 a.m. Regiment split up into strong points, carrying parties and "moppers up" attached to 2nd H.L.I. and 2nd Oxford and Bucks L.I. "went over". Canadians on the left gained Arleux and 2nd Oxford and Bucks took their first two objectives; here the list of successes ended. The 2nd H.L.I. were badly handled from Oppy Wood; the 6th Brigade were driven back to their original line; the 63rd Division, on the right, did not leave their trenches. B Company, attached to 2nd H.L.I., formed the right of the Brigade, in the air. Captain Taylor thereupon formed a defensive flank. As all our objectives had not been gained, four out of the five strong points were out of a job; they eventually established posts in the old German front line. The carrying parties did six journeys on this day and the "moppers up" were taken to stiffen the line. No enemy counter-attack that night, but both sides evinced a certain amount of "nerves" as shown by frequent S.O.S. signals and "panic" shelling.'

Of the attack on the 28th, General Pereira said:

'I put down our lack of success to two causes: first of all, with very weak battalions there is not sufficient strength to get

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through to the final objective with a very long advance, and the waves that have made a considerable advance are too weak to deal with vigorous counter-attacks. Secondly, owing to the battalions of the 63rd Division on our right not attacking, I believe owing to their not reaching their positions of assembly, our right was always in the air and the Bosche worked up their front line behind our advancing waves; this was an additional difficulty to their being taken in enfilade throughout the advance. We had a frontage of 2,200 yards with 3,500 rifles.'

During the night of the 28th/29th the 6th Brigade relieved the 99th Brigade, and fresh orders were issued for an attack to be made by the latter in conjunction with the 63rd Division on the right. Zero hour was to be 4 a.m. on the 29th.

The state of affairs in the front line when these orders were issued is as follows (taken from 5th Brigade orders):

'The situation at present on the right flank of the 5th Brigade is obscure and the 24th Royal Fusiliers are forming a defensive flank on the right of the Brigade, running roughly from junction of Ouse Trench and railway (on the northern outskirts of Bailleul), B.11.c to old British front line in B.11.d (i.e. about 1,600 yards north-east of Bailleul) during the night of the 28th/29th. To ensure touch mentioned in para. 2 being obtained (para. 2 stated the 5th Brigade was to "ensure that it was up to its right boundary in the old German front line") the 24th Royal Fusiliers will attack at 4 a.m. on the left of the 99th Brigade from south brigade boundary to B.12.c.9.4 (where a block had been formed in the old German line by the 17th Royal Fusiliers about 500 yards west of the Crucifix). It is presumed that the part of this front junction of Arleux Loop and Oppy Trench B.12.d.1.o. to B.12.c.9.4 (this was a small

section of trench south of the block mentioned to the junction of the two trenches) will be in our possession.'

Why it is presumed that that part of the trench 'will be in our possession' is not clear.

To continue:

'After capture of the portion of trench on this front not in our possession the 24th Royal Fusiliers will capture the German support line from where road crosses brigade boundary at B.18.b.5.7 (immediately west of Oppy Wood) to most south-eastern part held by the Brigade about B.12.d.5.6. They will then join up with 2nd Oxford and Bucks L.I. in the sunken road at B.12.d.5.9.¹ The 2nd Oxford and Bucks L.I., extending their front from the junction with 2nd Canadian Brigade at B.6.d.2.0 (just south-west of Arleux Village) to this point. On this, the final objective, being reached, the 24th Royal Fusiliers will at once consolidate. . . . All other units in the O.G. lines will be relieved, and on relief the 2nd H.L.I. will move to the support line and reorganize, and the 17th Royal Fusiliers to the old British front line. . . . 1st Royal Berks will be on the left of the 99th Brigade.'

It will be seen that although the 17th Royal Fusiliers were not actually ordered to attack the enemy, they hung on to their positions with fine tenacity.

The results of this fresh attack were again unsuccessful. The 24th Royal Fusiliers gallantly gained their first objective, but the 99th Brigade (though capturing a small portion of the Bosche line south of Oppy) could not capture Oppy

¹ Immediately north of Oppy there were four cross-roads at the apex of which was the Crucifix; the road mentioned in the orders was the one running north-west from the Crucifix.

Wood or Village, and, since their right was exposed, the 24th Royal Fusiliers had to fall back to their starting point.

'As a result of this operation,' records the Battalion diary of the 17th Royal Fusiliers, 'the Regiment was highly praised by all other regiments of the Brigade for the part it had played and the way in which it had helped them.'¹

Casualties in the operations to this date were 111 all ranks.²

The enemy opposite the 2nd Division were fresh troops of the 1st Guards Reserve Division, of whom the report records that they 'fought magnificently': they had unlimited bombs, whereas by a stroke of bad luck before the 99th Brigade made its attack, two or three ammunition dumps formed by the Brigade were blown up by hostile shell-fire just before zero.³

¹ The Battalion diary then sets out a list of 'Recommendations for awards', which is as follows: Military Cross—Captain F. L. Taylor, 2nd Lieutenant H. A. Ponting, 2nd Lieutenant A. Forbes-Menzies, 2nd Lieutenant H. S. Havelock. Distinguished Conduct Medal—Sergeant H. Thorn (B Company). Military Medal—Lance-Corporal A. J. K. Sinclair, Lance-Corporal E. Perkins, Lance-Corporal W. A. H. Wood, Lance-Corporal S. J. H. Mudd, Private A. E. Coppack.

² Including 2nd Lieutenants E. F. Beale and S. Sheppard killed and 2nd Lieutenants A. Forbes-Menzies and E. W. Bratchell wounded.

³ For further notes on 'Oppy', by C. S. M. Douglas, see Appendices.

CHAPTER IX

'THIRD SCARPE, 1917': 3RD-4TH MAY

ATTENUATED as was the 2nd Division after the Battle of Arleux, its life-blood was to be drained still further before the much-needed relief came. For on the 30th of April, at a Corps Conference, the G.O.C. was told that the 2nd Division was to take part in an attack by the Third and First Armies from Fontaine-lez-Croisilles to Fresnoy; the Division was to be given a frontage of attack of 1,000 yards.

'I explained', said General Pereira, 'that the only way the Division could do anything now that we were so weak in numbers and so many of the men unfit for further operations, was by forming a composite brigade of the remnants of the three Brigades. This, of course, meant that after the operations the Division would be reduced to a mere skeleton. It was ruled that we should have to carry out our share of the attack.'

On the 1st of May the trench strength of the 5th Brigade was only 1,237, that of the 6th

Brigade 1,322 and of the 99th Brigade 1,028, so that the G.O.C. was not exaggerating when he said that the Division would be reduced to a mere skeleton after another attack.

At noon orders were issued for the formation of four composite battalions: each battalion of the 5th Brigade was to furnish one company to be styled A Battalion; B Battalion was formed from companies of the 6th Brigade; while C and D Battalions were furnished from battalions of the 99th Brigade.

Even the composite battalions were pitifully weak, for each company was to consist of 3 officers and 95 other ranks, making a total of 12 officers and 380 other ranks of 'the freshest men available'.

Where indeed were 'fresh' men to be found after the exhausting operations through which the 2nd Division had already passed?

The 17th Fusiliers thus describe their part in the formation of the Composite Battalion 'A':

'Battalion Headquarters, 3 officers and 96 other ranks were ordered to form a composite company in a composite (5th Brigade) battalion, under Lieut.-Colonel S. V. P. Weston, D.S.O., M.C. This and other similar formations from the 6th and 99th Brigades, under Brig.-General Kellett, were given the task of capturing Oppy Wood and Village. The composite company was in reserve and not used, the attack having failed to attain its objective.

'The remainder of the Battalion, under Major R. J. Brett, returned to Tommy Trench and the Kleeman Stellung on the

night of the 1st/2nd, and at 2 p.m. on the 2nd were ordered to form up on the Lens-Arras road and march to "X" Huts, Ecoivres. The Battalion (less composite company) arrived in camp at 6.20 p.m. On the 3rd tracks were made, and the day was spent in rest and marching.'

The 17th Royal Fusiliers were not involved in the fighting, though two companies of Colonel Weston's ('A') Battalion were moved, one to the Arleux Loop and the other to the old British line west of Arleux Loop; the two remaining companies were used for carrying duties and the evacuation of the wounded. It is, therefore, unnecessary to go into details of the attack.

The best and briefest narrative of the operations is in the G.O.C.'s own diary and reads as follows:

'Zero was at 3.45 a.m. The night had been a noisy one and the enemy appeared very jumpy.

'To-day's attack was on a wider front than any other British attack on previous occasions.¹ The 31st Division had Oppy as their objective and ground to the north of it; 2nd Division the Arleux Loop; Canadians, Fresnoy. We captured all our objectives² and so did the Canadians; the 31st Division did not get beyond their forming-up trenches as they got barraged twice in their forming-up place. We escaped all barrages owing to our forming up 300 yards in front of our own line and 350 yards from the Bosche.

¹ The front of the general attack on the 3rd of May was over sixteen miles, the Third and First Armies attacking from Fontaine-lez-Croisilles to Fresnoy and the Fifth Army at Bullecourt.

² But the centre was lost, as related later.

'Once more we had the bad luck to have an entirely open flank, and the result was that we had to form a defensive flank right back to our jumping-off line, and during the morning we lost the centre part of our objective. I was afraid of what might happen on the right, and before the attack I had ordered some strong points to be made where our right rested and put Stokes mortars and trench mortars in them, with the result that when the 31st Division attack failed there were about six counter-attacks against this part of the line, but they were all dealt with, with ease, by the trench mortars and we had no more trouble on that flank.

'Our left flank was firmly established, in touch with the Canadians who were not suffering from a shortage of men and who were most helpful. Our centre consisted of about 1,000 yards of wrecked trench, but it was not clear if it was entirely in our hands. Instead of only 1,000 yards of front we had 1,800 yards, owing to our right being thrown back. As we only started with 1,800 rifles it meant great determination on the part of the composite brigade to have captured it and to hold it. None of the men were fresh, and most of them had had continuous fighting and heavy work since the present operations began.'

The Third Battle of the Scarpe, 1917, ended the Battles of Arras of that year, though in two small attacks Roeux was captured on the 13th/14th May and Oppy Wood fell at last on the 28th of June to the 5th and 31st Divisions.

The 2nd Division and, therefore, the 17th Royal Fusiliers entered now upon a long period of trench warfare, for it was not until the end of November, 1917, that the Division again took part in major operations.

CHAPTER X

TRENCH WARFARE: MAY-NOVEMBER, 1917

ON the 4th of May Colonel Weston, Lieutenant Lavarack and the composite company rejoined the Battalion, the latter having during the day marched to Cambligneul whither motor-buses conveyed the C.O.'s party from St. Catherines. The 2nd Division had been relieved at last, and on the following day the 5th Brigade set out on the march to Dieval where a short period of training was to take place.

This eleven-mile march was carried out in intense heat, and it says much for the stamina of the Fusiliers that, tired out and exhausted as they were, only five men fell out.

Whenever a Division was relieved from the front line and moved back to a training area, there was invariably a conference at Divisional Headquarters for the discussion of recent operations. On the results of these discussions C.O.'s usually modelled their training programme. But, alas! so often it happened that

just as a battalion had settled down properly to train, movement orders arrived and off they went to some other sector or moved back to the old one from which they had come. Seldom indeed was it possible to give a division, or any unit, long enough to carry out really effective training over a reasonable period. This was a serious matter, for as the War dragged on it became ever more scientific, and new methods of defence or attack were constantly being introduced. Reinforcement drafts from home were smaller in numbers and lacking in training. The G.O.C. thus inveighs against the poor quality of the reinforcements sent to him just after the Oppy operations:

'We recently got seven hundred reinforcements for the 6th Brigade. Most of them enlisted only seven or nine weeks ago. Out of this short period one has to subtract the time taken for inoculation and leave, and it does not represent much time for turning the men into soldiers. At the Training Centre they get twenty-one days' sound training, but it is obvious that a division composed of 50 or 60 per cent. of such men and untrained material will not stand a very great chance in heavy uphill fighting. One cannot place any reliance on such material, and they are useless with either rifle or bomb, in fact they are a standing danger to their comrades with the latter and harmless to the Bosche with the former. Chances of real steady and progressive training seldom occur. We have to fight, to provide whole brigades at a time for work, and at the same time instil the rudiments of soldiering into our drafts. Why cannot more be done with the drafts before we receive them?'

That very fairly sums up the position which

faced Colonel Weston when, with his depleted Battalion, he arrived at Dieval for a period of training. The 17th Royal Fusiliers had been reduced to such small numbers that it was found necessary to reorganize companies into two platoons, each of five sections, two Lewis-gun sections, one bombing section, one rifle-grenade section and one section of riflemen.

Reorganization and training began on the 6th. On that date 2 officers and 23 other ranks arrived from Ruybeck, but apart from these and a few odd sick men rejoined, no drafts of any strength were received. - But the thing most worrying to C.O.'s was the constant loss of experienced officers and N.C.O.'s and the difficulty of replacing them. The average seasoned N.C.O. was a splendid fellow; to use a common phrase, 'he knew the ropes', and was of untold worth to his battalion and company commander. Many a brave and gallant N.C.O. had been lost in front of Oppy, and they were hard to replace. The 17th lost their full share. Indeed, gradually, the old Battalion which had landed in France in 1915 was becoming extinct; enemy action reduced the number of the 'originals' still further.

There is no exact information in the Battalion diary of how many officers and men came out of the line after the Oppy operations, but the Divisional records put the trench strength of the 17th Royal Fusiliers at 23 officers and 252 other

ranks. To that number must be added the 'details' left out of the line according to orders whenever an attack took place, officers, N.C.O.'s and men on 'courses' or detached from the Battalion.

At Dieval the strength of the Fusiliers was 532 all ranks.

The original Battalion consisted of 31 officers and 994 other ranks when it left England in 1915.

From the 6th to the 16th was spent in training and reorganization. Training took the form of arms and squad drill, Lewis-gun mechanism and stoppages, firing on range by every member, bombing, first with 'dummies' and then with live bombs, bayonet fighting, musketry, rapid loading and aiming, muscle exercises, ball firing on range, gas drill, rifle-grenade drill, including the use of the new short rifle (the latter throwing a grenade nearly one hundred yards further than the ordinary rifle); wiring, teams of six men practising with short stakes, barbed wire and concertina, and schemes for signallers.

A bombing class was also held under Captain Young, a topography class for officers and N.C.O.'s, instructed by Captain Greenwood, and a sniping class under 2nd Lieutenant McHaffie.

The 2nd Division had recently formed a Rifleman's School for the purpose of teaching men the individual use of the rifle, the use of ground,

sharp-shooting and stalking as well as confidence and reliance in themselves. Every company was to have a certain percentage of specially-trained riflemen available to go out and cover the front in an intelligent manner so that, if they saw a Bosche within reasonable range, they could put him out of action without disclosing their positions. This School was 'run' by an officer who at one time was a Canadian trapper—a keen man who very soon raised the standard of sniping.

But if the Fusiliers worked hard at their training they also played hard, which was all for the good of the Battalion—officers and men. A football match frequently closed the day's doings, among the most notable of these events being Officers *v.* Sergeants, which the former won 3-0; 17th Royal Fusiliers *v.* Highland Light Infantry, the latter winning by the small margin 1-0. But the officers of the former had their revenge on the officers of the latter, whom, a few days later, they trounced to the tune of 6-1. There was also a Company Tournament, A Company beating D in the final by 1-0, after a tremendous struggle, thereby winning fifty-five francs.

To add still further to the pleasant amenities of life behind the front line, Battalion Headquarters arranged for the opening of wet and dry canteens. These proved a great success, and

Battalion funds benefited considerably from 10 per cent profits on sales.

Lastly, because statements have often been made which tend to throw discredit upon a fine body of men who, as a unit, did their duty nobly, the Padres held voluntary services each Sunday.

On the 17th of May the 17th Royal Fusiliers moved back to billets in Ecoivres, the reason being that, although the 2nd Division was in Corps Reserve and training, one brigade (each brigade took it in turn) was in close formation behind the front line—on this occasion it was the 5th. So on the morning of the 17th the Battalion set out on the fourteen-mile march, reaching its destination without casualties (men falling out). On reaching Ecoivres 3 officers, 1 warrant officer and 8 N.C.O.'s were sent up to Pernes for the training of drafts.

The duties of the brigade in the forward area were to supply working parties as well as to continue with as much training as could be carried out. For work purposes, therefore, the 5th Brigade again moved forward on the 18th, the 17th Royal Fusiliers to tents and bivouacs in Hull Camp, east of the Lens-Arras road, not far from Roclincourt. Two companies had preceded the Battalion and these dug till 2.30 p.m.

Thereafter from the 19th until the 23rd the Fusiliers 'found' 160 men each day for road-

making duties on the Maison de la Cote road. Complete units were taken under their own companies, the remaining companies in camp carrying out training.

New aluminium sights had been fitted to the snipers' rifles and range practice was carried out.

Four officers left the Battalion on the night of the 23rd on attachment to the 1st Bedfords of the 5th Division, then holding the front line in the Arleux sector. They were to remain in the line until the 2nd Division took over the front and the Fusiliers the particular sub-sector allotted to them.

The 5th and 99th Brigades relieved the 5th Division on the nights of the 23rd/24th and 24th/25th of May, the former the 15th Brigade in the left sub-sector of the Divisional front. The left sub-sector included Arleux.

The Fusiliers relieved the Bedfords of the 5th Division on the night of the 23rd/24th. C and D Companies (right and left) went into the front line east of the village, while Battalion Headquarters with A and B were in the support trench, the original Arleux Loop.

The Battalion sector is not easy to describe, but it included the northern half of Arleux, the dividing line between the two front-line battalions of the 5th Brigade (2nd Highland Light Infantry, on the right, 17th Royal Fusiliers, on the left) running from north-east to south-west

THE 1ST BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS

through the centre of the village. On their left the Fusiliers had Canadian troops.

During the relief Sergeants R. C. Beck and A. V. Brock and Corporal Wiltshire were killed and 3 other ranks wounded—an unfortunate beginning. The loss of three good N.C.O.'s was serious enough, but the 'originals' of the Battalion saw in the deaths of their three gallant comrades something worse—the still further reduction of their numbers. An unlucky shell fell in the Arleux Loop where it cut the Willerval Road with the above fatal results.

The situation in the front line at this period may be described as 'quiet', i.e. no attacks by, or on, the enemy. The latter had, a week or two earlier, recaptured Fresnoy, and when the Fusiliers took over the line the industrious Bosche was busy, whenever we allowed him to be, putting the village into a complete state of defence, strengthening existing trenches and digging new ones. All of which patrols discovered to the subsequent annoyance of the enemy.

During the day shell-fire was intermittent, but the enemy's aircraft were busy and air fights were frequent and watched with breathless excitement from the trenches.

Improvements

accomplished =

and lastly:

namely:

trenches and patrol work at night. On the 25th Campbell, each accompanied the Germans

consolidating their position in front of Fresnoy Park, about 600 yards from the Battalion's front line. Having noted the position, the patrol retired—the artillery were left to deal with the enemy's endeavours.

The daylight hours of the 26th were again quiet. At night 2nd Lieutenant Ayscough and Sergeant England each took out patrols. A listening post was established on the Fresnoy road and a rifle post at the junction of the Battalion's trenches and a communication trench which ran into the German lines. Between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m., 26th/27th, the front line was very heavily shelled by the enemy, probably for the purpose of covering his working parties.

Throughout the 27th there was 'nothing doing' until at night, at 10 p.m., our guns suddenly opened fire on the enemy's ration dumps with gas and lachrymatory shells. The point is interesting, for it shows to what extent our intelligence and observation officers had knowledge of the enemy's organization behind his front line. Ration dumps were usually busy places after darkness had fallen and we knew at what hour they were likely to be crowded by the enemy's troops.

For the time being the Bosche did not reply.

Patrols that night, under 2nd Lieutenants Ayscough and Stead, went out and penetrated into Fresnoy Park where they found the northern

end not wired and very little work going on. The southern end was considerably stronger. At about 1 a.m. the Canadians, on the left of the Fusiliers, were raided, or rather the enemy made a futile attempt at a raid, for not one of his troops reached the trenches of the former.

On the 28th the enemy retaliated for the shell-fire of the previous night. During the day his guns waxed furious and swept the Brigade area with shell of all calibre. Yet, though he battered the defences, blew in dug-outs and in places turned the trenches of the Fusiliers into a sorry spectacle, only one man was killed and two had to be sent down suffering from shell-shock. At about midnight the Fusiliers were relieved and moved back to the reserve line about Farbus Wood. Three days out of the front line and then, on the 31st, the Battalion went back into the Arleux Loop sector again.

The tour which followed is described as being 'without incident', and on the 3rd the 17th Middlesex relieved the Fusiliers who marched back first to the Transport Lines, where tea was served, and then on to Anzin-St. Aubin. In this place, where they were billeted from the 4th to the 10th of June, they supplied daily working parties for the front line and back areas: in between times companies carried out training whenever possible, and on the 7th the G.O.C.,

2nd Division, has the following note in his diary:

'I rode with Bullen-Smith¹ to St. Aubin to see the 17th Royal Fusiliers training. They have got an army gymnastic instructor who was giving them real live instruction and making the men keen and interested and move with a snap. They did bayonet practice ending up with consolidation and rapid-rifle fire on a warning order of a counter-attack.'

On the 11th all ranks were passed through the gas chamber at Ecurie.

The period at St. Aubin was not unpleasant. The warm weather was a welcome change and when the day's work was over swimming races took place in the local stream. At this period, also, Colonel Weston went off to a G.H.Q. Conference at Boulogne and Major R. Brett assumed temporary command of the Battalion.²

The 11th of June found the Fusiliers back on the railway embankment at Bailleul, in support of other battalions of the Brigade holding the front line. At night the usual working parties were supplied. The three days spent in this position were very quiet. Fritz, presumably, was similarly engaged in improving his line. But, perhaps, the true explanation is that a lot

¹ Brig.-General G. M. Bullen-Smith, G.O.C., 5th Infantry Brigade.

² Another interesting event early in June was the first issue of the 2nd Division sign, or badge, i.e. one red star between two white stars, all enclosed in an oval.

of his guns had been moved up to the Messines front where an attack, launched on the 7th, was still in progress.

All ranks went into 'shorts' on the 14th: this innovation was a blessing. The Battalion had moved back to Budbrooke Camp with orders to help in the construction of an overland duck-board track from Roclincourt to the front line. The infernal rain, combined with Fritz's violent objection to movement between the front line and back areas, made work on the trenches a constant necessity.

The Battalion diary for the 17th contains the following entry: 'No. 21. Sergt. H. Thorn awarded the D.C.M. This gallant N.C.O., wounded 2/6/17, has been through all engagements with the Battalion since its arrival in France and has been three times recommended.'

The relief of the 2nd Division by the 5th Division had begun on the night of the 13th/14th. The 99th Brigade was the first to go, then the 6th Brigade, but it was the 19th before 5th Brigade Headquarters opened at Mont St. Eloy, whither the 17th Royal Fusiliers also marched on that date, billeting for the night in the out-houses of the Monastery.

The Battalion had seen the last of Arras for some time, for although Divisional Headquarters had been given to understand that they were destined for Ypres, finally the Division was

ordered to return to the scene of its early struggles in 1915, in the sector astride the La Bassee Canal. At this period the Canal Sector consisted of three sub-sectors, i.e. Cambrin, on the right, Canal in the centre, and Givenchy on the left and north of the Canal.

The 5th Brigade was the first to move north and, until the arrival of the remainder of the Division, was to take over all three sub-sectors, one battalion of the Brigade holding the front line of each until relieved by the 6th or 99th Brigades. The Canal Right Sub-Sector was allotted to the 2nd Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, the centre to the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the left to the 17th Royal Fusiliers.

By bus the latter arrived at Bethune on the 20th and spent the night in the Orphanage. The next night they relieved the 2/10th Manchesters (66th Division) in the Givenchy sub-sector and describe that relief as a 'very good handing over'.

A strange thing had happened to the Fusiliers: after nearly two years they had come back again to the very sector in which, in November, 1915, they had received their baptism of fire. The thoughts of all the 'originals' turned back to that first twenty-four hours' tour of instruction in the front line: the intense excitement with which they looked out at No Man's Land—albeit through a periscope or, in defiance of strict

orders to keep their heads down, 'over the top': of that feeling of sickness which often comes to one at the first sight of the bloody remains of a comrade, blown to pieces or maimed by a shell or trench-mortar bomb: of the nauseating feeling when faced for the first time by the ghastly conditions in the front-line trenches, the sheer desolation all around, blasted and tumbled houses and farms, the ground pock-marked by shell-holes filled with noisome, stinking water, of the mud and filth everywhere. They had arrived 'at the War'—and what a War! There used to be a signpost south of the La Basse Canal, which some wag had put up, with an inscription on it—'To the War'. Well! the 17th Royal Fusiliers so far had had their share of it!

Several days were quiet—'very quiet', the records state, and then at 8 p.m. on the 26th of June Fritz began to bombard the left company of the Fusiliers and the trenches of the 1st King's (6th Brigade), who in the meantime had come into the front line on the left, with heavy trench mortars and light guns.

Out in front of the Givenchy sub-sector there was a large crater, named the Red Dragon Crater, held by us, almost directly opposite the Duck's Bill (a prominent projection in the German line). The raid did not touch the 17th Royal Fusiliers, but it is necessary to mention it, for it was the first of a series of raids by, or on, the enemy

during the time the 2nd Division held the Canal Sector.¹ Unfortunately in the enemy's bombardment C.S.M. R. A. Mines was killed—another severe loss to the Fusiliers.

Trench warfare of a strenuous and violent character had now set in. A Bavarian division was opposed to the 2nd Division, and at this period the Germans had a trained body of men attached to each division called 'Storm Troops' (or *Sturmtrupp*): they were intended for raiding purposes. It was, therefore, obvious that a good deal of what might be termed 'small fighting' was imminent.

The Fusiliers now held the right of the 5th Brigade sub-sector, north of the Canal. The sector was of a curious nature. In the southern half No Man's Land was particularly wide—500 yards in places—whereas the northern half, i.e. from the Duck's Bill to the left boundary of the Brigade front, was narrow and broken up by an almost continuous line of mine craters. In the Fusiliers' sub-sector various saps ran out towards the German lines, just as there were saps from the enemy's trenches pushed out towards ours. These saps occasioned much bombing on both sides.

The front-line trench held by the Battalion appears to have had no name, only numbers such

¹ The raid was beaten off by the King's and 12 prisoners taken by them.

as A.15.2, A.15.3: the communication trenches back to the support trenches were also numbered 45-55, i.e. from just north of the Canal to opposite the Duck's Bill. The support trench was Streatham Walk, from which several communication trenches—Cheyne Walk, Orchard Road, Baker Street, Finchley Road, Glasgow Street, etc.—led back to Bayswater, Oxford Terrace and Cambridge Terrace: the main line of defence—the Spoil Bank and Orchard Farm Keep—lay west of the support trenches, and 600 to 700 yards north of the Farm was Givenchy, the village lying in the northern half of the Brigade sub-sector.

Of the saps which ran out from the front line towards the enemy's trenches, and of special interest to the 17th Royal Fusiliers, one was Death or Glory Sap, near the Canal, held in the first few days of July by C Company. The enemy's trenches, almost opposite the sap, were known as The Tortoise.

The month began vigorously. Hostile wiring parties were dispersed by Lewis-gun fire. Then sounds of pumping were heard near a mine crater (Surrey Crater). The Tunnelling Officer was consulted and he stated that the sound apparently emanated from a known mine shaft, which was, however, effectively countered by a 'mine of our own'.

Now if there was one thing which tried the

nerves of those in the front line it was the knowledge that the enemy was preparing a mine below the trench, which might at any moment 'go up' into the air, with all and everything in the neighbourhood. But the Tunnelling Officer's report did much to allay the fear of those in the front line.

The enemy was very vigilant. An S.O.S. message was sent up on the 2nd of July, consisting of a golden rain rocket. This immediately produced a violent outburst of German 'hate': the Bosche mistrusted lights sailing up into the sky.

At about 12.15 a.m. on the 3rd the enemy suddenly put down a 'Minnie' barrage, using gas bombs, on the main line of defence, i.e. Bayswater, Oxford and Cambridge Terraces. About twelve 'Minnies' were in action, two firing from The Tortoise and the remainder from sap-heads opposite the centre of the Fusiliers' trenches.

Fifteen minutes later two parties of Germans, each numbering about twenty men, approached Death or Glory Sap. One party advanced along the northern bank of the Canal—their heads were silhouetted against the skyline. The second party, concealed by the long grass, advanced on the sap from the north, but disclosed their presence by throwing an egg bomb.

Then Lewis guns and all the riflemen in the sap at once opened fire, while the centre company

of the Battalion, who could also see the Bosche, opened an intense fire on the latter, in direct enfilade.

The enemy scattered and fled, leaving one dead man and another dying on the wire entanglements. Groans were also heard at frequent intervals throughout the night, and when dawn broke two wounded Germans were observed crawling back to their lines.

The officer-in-charge of a machine-gun section on the southern bank of the Canal afterwards reported that at 2.45 a.m. an enemy stretcher-bearer party was seen carrying wounded. Casualties among the raiders must have been heavy, for five Lewis guns were in action besides rifles, each gun firing from 400 to 600 rounds. A 3-inch Stokes mortar fired from No. 11 Brick-stack, south of the Canal.

Throughout the attack the enemy's machine guns fired heavily and continuously on the sap. His raiders 'came over' without equipment or steel helmets or bayonets and were armed only with rifles and egg bombs: they wore their gas helmets.

The defeat of this raid was due to the steadiness and gallant conduct of all ranks and to the admirable work of the N.C.O.'s in charge of the Lewis guns. Second-Lieutenant A. H. A. Ayscough was out in No Man's Land, just starting on patrol, when the Germans were first seen. At the sound of the first shot he returned to the

sap and took charge, displaying rare coolness and judgment in his instant grasp of the situation. He was subsequently awarded the Military Cross, while No. 4190 Lance-Corporal W. Whitson, who also specially distinguished himself, received the Military Medal.

The Brigade, Divisional and Corps Commanders all sent their congratulations to C Company.

Between the 4th and 10th of July night patrols crossed No Man's Land to discover which sap-heads were held by the enemy. There was another aspect—the control of No Man's Land. In numerous parts of the line along the Western Front our troops were absolute masters of that dread space between the lines of opposing trenches. In some sectors no German dared set his foot in No Man's Land after darkness had fallen. During the six nights between the above dates no enemy was encountered by the Fusiliers' patrols, which seemed to show that the latter had achieved their object.

A humorous 'touch' invades the Battalion diary in the entry dated '4th–10th'. It is stated that 'Fishing in the La Basse Canal with No. 5 Mills spinners, officially forbidden'.

This was hard lines on the devotees of the piscatorial art among the Fusiliers, who had discovered that a Mills bomb on explosion in the water of the Canal usually sent up to the surface

and gave warning. The remaining two men were wounded and dragged back towards the German line by their captors. Before reaching it, however, one of the men—No. 51343 Private H. Jordan, though wounded in six places, hit his escort over the head with his fist and escaped, regaining his own lines despite the fact that he had to pass across ground swept by Lewis-gun fire, which had been opened on the enemy. The Bosche party was estimated at nine men, one of whom was left dead in the post.

Private Jordan was awarded the Military Medal for his gallantry.

Raids on the enemy took place on the 25th and 26th by battalions on the left and right of the Fusiliers, but not by the latter: at present plans only were being discussed.

On the 27th the Battalion extended its right boundary, D Company taking over a front extending from the southern bank of the Canal to Nos. 14, 9 and 10 Brickstacks, inclusive, from the 2nd Highland Light Infantry.

These brickstacks were one of the most prominent features of the Canal Centre Sector. From 1915 they had been a bone of contention between the opposing forces, and by the summer of 1917 No Man's Land ran through the centre of some twenty to thirty stacks of bricks. Here also the ground between the lines of trenches was a mass of mine craters, the western lips of which

were held by us, and the eastern by the enemy. Tough bombing fights took place frequently and when the enemy's guns shelled the area, or our guns shelled the stacks behind his front line, bricks flew in all directions and were as great a danger as shell splinters.

Behind the front line lay Cuinchy, in ruins of course, while the Church had been reduced to a shapeless mass.

Strange how names clung to the trenches, for the latter still bore the same names which had been given to them by 2nd Division troops over two years previously: Coldstream Lane, Berkshire Road, Hertford Street, were all named by battalions of the Division in 1915, while other names were clear evidence that London troops had been located in the sector when the trenches were named: there were, for instance, Old Kent Road, Edgware Road, Marylebone Road and Sackville Street, and there was a keep named Park Lane Redoubt.

Came August and on the 2nd the 24th Royal Fusiliers relieved the 17th and the latter moved back again to Preol. The Battalion was very tired and two hours' light training each day was almost as much as everybody could stand. The long spell in the trenches had taken much of the 'go' out of all ranks, for when troops are too tired to take part in organized sports, they must have had a hard gruelling: a few cricket matches

played by the Fusiliers during this rest period were rather tame affairs.

On the 8th, therefore, when they returned to the Canal Sector and relieved the 24th Royal Fusiliers they had not greatly benefited by the so-called rest out of the line. The enemy, however, was inclined to be more docile, for further north the Third Battle of Ypres had begun and Fritz's attention was urgently riveted on the dreadful Salient where the guns were never quiet and Death stalked the bloody plains of Flanders with a greedy hand.

On the night of the 10th/11th the Tunnelling Company exploded a mine near the Red Dragon Crater, which swallowed up the East Surrey Crater, merging the latter into one huge gash in the earth. As the miners who had blown our mine were certain that the charge they had put in could not possibly have produced such results, the impression was that we had forestalled the Bosche, who intended blowing a mine of their own.

The result was that the far lip of the crater, considerably higher than the near lip, was occupied by the enemy. The 'heavies' would, of course, soon level the far lip, but there was a better method, to clear the Bosche from the crater entirely, and this the 17th Royal Fusiliers proceeded to do.

Colonel Weston's plan, submitted to, and approved by, General Bullen-Smith, was as follows: 75 other ranks, under Major Hole, were

to retake the crater. Three parties, each consisting of 15 other ranks under an officer, were to establish posts along the near lip of the crater. The men were to take tools, sandbags, Very lights and each a box of bombs. A reserve of 25 men was to be kept near No. 9 Post. These were to form the first wave. The second wave was to consist of 30 other ranks in close support, 6 rifle grenadiers, following in rear, were to break down any serious opposition. Two companies of the 24th Royal Fusiliers were to take over and hold the left sub-sector of the Battalion front during this operation and were also to supply a working party to dig a trench from the front line to the new crater which had already been named 'Warlingham' by the 17th Battalion.

The three parties forming the first wave of the attack were commanded by 2nd Lieutenants W. Lucas, E. J. Barber and E. Scholfield: the officers commanding the second wave were 2nd Lieutenants J. Lucas and C. W. Sherwood, in charge of the right and left parties respectively.

The 6-inch howitzers and field guns were to bombard the crater preparatory to the attack and an 18-pounder barrage was to be put down at zero hour, which had been fixed for 9.30 p.m., 11th August.

The attacking troops were to go straight to their objective and were forbidden to throw a bomb until the lip of the crater was reached.

Colonel Weston's report of the operations is as follows:

'On the commencement of the attack the enemy vacated their positions with the exception of two men who were killed. All objectives were reached and three posts were established at A.9.d.95.10, A.9.d.90.15 and A.9.d.90.175 (i.e. on the lip of the crater). The enemy's retaliation was not severe and the work of consolidation proceeded vigorously. Three wiring parties wired the flanks of the posts. Bombs and ammunition were carried up. A trench commanding the posts was started. The 276th Field Company, R.E., under 2nd Lieutenant Miller, taped a new trench from A.9.d.94 to A.9.d.95.10. The trench was dug to an average depth of four feet by a party of seventy-five of the 24th Royal Fusiliers.

'At 2.45 a.m.' the attacking troops were withdrawn. The two flank posts were manned by an officer, six men and a N.C.O. each, and the centre post by six men and a N.C.O. In addition a Lewis gun was placed in each flank post. Our total casualties amounted to 3 killed and 10 wounded. Identifications were forwarded to Brigade Headquarters.

'Beyond continual sniping and machine-gun fire the enemy kept perfectly quiet until 3.10 a.m. At that moment a furious bombardment was concentrated on our new position and the front and support lines. This continued until 3.30 a.m. when it gradually died down.

'All ranks displayed a fine military spirit both in the attack and in the work of consolidation. In conclusion I wish to draw the attention of the Brigadier-General Commanding to the courage and organizing ability displayed by Major Hole throughout the entire operation.'¹

The Battalion diary finally adds: 'The under-

¹ Major Hole was subsequently awarded a bar to his Military Cross, and C.Q.M.S. J. Mead the Military Medal for devotion to duty in connection with this attack.

mentioned have been awarded the Military Medal in connection with the operation: Sergt. J. Carrington, L/Sgt. S. Ellis, Sergt. A. Dray, Cpl. G. Ayres, L/Cpl. A. Uttley, L/Cpl. D. Lowry, Pte. W. Smoker.'

'Warlingham', the new crater, now loomed large in the life of the Battalion. In 'Comic Cuts' (otherwise Tactical Progress Reports) the crater is frequently mentioned as being shelled and trench mortared, though a little wholesome retaliation by the 2nd Division artillery dampened the enemy's ardour. He had, however, pushed out a sap towards the crater, which foreshadowed trouble in the future.

On the 12th the Battalion relieved the two companies of 24th Royal Fusiliers who had held the line during the above operation, and on the 13th took over the company frontage immediately south of the Canal from the 2nd Highland Light Infantry. But on the 14th the 24th Royal Fusiliers relieved the 17th as a whole and the latter marched back again to Le Preol.

Private H. Clarke is mentioned on the 15th of August as having been awarded the Military Medal.

The six days' 'rest' ended, the Battalion returned to the Canal Sector. But the tour was uneventful, the diary mentioning only intermittent shell-fire on 'Warlingham'. The 26th found the Fusiliers moving back into Brigade Support,

Battalion Headquarters being at Kingsclere (south of the Canal), and companies at Braddel Castle, Mountain Keep, Tower Reserve, Marylebone Road, Esperanto Terrace, Cambridge Terrace, Spoil Bank and Orchard Keep.

Three days were thus spent and then back again into the Canal Sector the 17th returned.

Portuguese troops were attached to the 2nd Division at this period for instruction in trench warfare. They were a curious lot and regarded themselves as professional soldiers, whereas they looked upon the British as amateurs and therefore incapable of giving instruction. The men were good material, but the officers were of poor quality. The Portuguese had been given a sector of their own, but they were so lazy that the trenches were falling into disrepair. They were, therefore, told that unless they worked they would be taken out of the line as incompetent to hold trenches. Their reputed saying was, 'The night is for sleep and the day for repose'. That there was good material among the N.C.O.'s and men is evident from the fact that one night one of their lance-corporals saw two Bosche in front of the wire. He went out, wounded one German with his bayonet and collared the other and brought him in a prisoner.

The 17th Royal Fusiliers merely mention that Portuguese troops were attached to the Battalion and were split up amongst the posts.

The final entry in the Battalion diary for August is a list of names of those who during the month had made the supreme sacrifice: 2nd Lieutenant S. F. Drummond, Corporal E. Perkins, Lance-Corporals D. Gordon, J. Dunn, R. Hart, and Privates W. Wolfe, J. Wilson, F. Saunders, E. Spear, H. Brown, L. Jenner, A. Daisley, A. Utteridge and J. Finch.

On the 31st of August the ration strength of the Battalion was 474 all ranks and the trench strength 364 all ranks.

The tour ended on the 4th of September and the Fusiliers moved back to Le Preol, the attached Portuguese going back to Beuvry.

The month was, however, the most uneventful since the Battalion moved north from the Arras front, i.e. so far as the front line was concerned. The Battles of Ypres were at their height and as a consequence the British artillery on other sections of the Western Front was 'rationed': their ammunition was limited. This had the effect of drawing less fire from the enemy and as a consequence life in the front line was more peaceful.

Yet, the Bosche was kept very much on the *qui vive*, for a prodigious quantity of gas was projected on to his lines and he must have regretted having first used it. On the 10th the Battalion lost Major J. Brett, who returned to his own Battalion—2nd Oxford and Bucks Light

Infantry—as second-in-command. On the 29th of September ‘usual’ billets were occupied in Le Preol.

Only one tour in the front line was served by the 17th Royal Fusiliers during October, i.e. from the 4th to the 6th, and by the 9th the Battalion was located in billets at Lapugnoy, the 2nd Division having moved to the Auchel area, where at last the long-overdue training period was to be carried out.

The Fusiliers had marched into Lapugnoy, via Chocques, on the 8th, and on the following day the Battalion was reorganized on the old lines of four platoons per company. Companies were then inoculated.

Then began a vigorous training programme which, in the not too distant future, was to bear splendid fruit. Rifle practice on the range, practising the attack and all the various items of the usual training programme kept all ranks busy during the working hours.

On the 17th the results of a Brigade Musketry Competition, which had taken place some days previously, were published. The 17th Royal Fusiliers had won both the Lewis-gun and Platoon Competitions. On this date also the Divisional Competition was fired off at Auchel, the Fusiliers finishing second and only $4\frac{1}{2}$ points behind the 1st King’s Royal Rifles—the winners.

The rapid-fire competitions held in the Division at this period were of great benefit and several units were almost back to the pre-war rate of fire, i.e. fifteen aimed shots per minute.

Lectures on all sorts of subjects were given by various officers, including a lecture to all officers and N.C.O.'s by General Bullen-Smith, the Brigade Commander.

On the last day of October the ration strength of the Battalion was 39 officers and 729 other ranks: not for a long while had it stood as high as that; even so, some 200 N.C.O.'s and men were still required to bring the Fusiliers up to full strength.

November began with increased activity in the instruction of snipers and many hours were spent on the ranges. The diary also speaks of the new drafts having settled down—'of good physique'.

The first few days were spent at Lupugny, but rumours had already circulated that the Division was to move north to take part in the Battles of Ypres, and when on the 5th the Battalion began to pack up and received orders to march to Thiennes on the 6th, rumour gave place to certainty.

Nobody fell out on the march to Thiennes, though it was 20 kilometres distant, but on the following day when the march was continued to St. Sylvestre Cappel—15 kilometres—the cobble

stones temporarily knocked out some of the men's feet.

The 2nd Division now formed part of the II. Corps and on the 8th moved to Zermezele via Cassel—another 10 kilometres. Companies were rather scattered in the Zermezele area but billets were good. The Battalion was informed that it would probably stay in the area for a short while, and indeed it was the 14th before orders were received to move and the Fusiliers again 'packed up'.

On the 15th they marched to Winnezele—12 kilometres—where a vile camp, pitched in a ploughed field, inches deep in mud, was to be their resting-place. It took two days to clear the place before it was in anything like a habitable condition.

Again rumours beset the Battalion: the Division was to go to Italy. But no such thing happened, for on the night of the 22nd the Fusiliers marched to Cassel Station and entrained for Achiet-le-Grand—they were going back to the old battlefields of the Somme area.

They did not know it, but they were going also to where their courage, their devotion to duty and self-sacrifice were to be put to the test, as fierce and as fiery as that to which gold is subjected. They had trained hard during the longest period of training they had ever had out of the line since they landed in France: they were fit,

they were eager. As the train carried them south they sang their songs, they whistled their war tunes, the while Death counted his numbers and the gods plaited their laurel wreaths for those who were to fall—to rise no more.

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT FIGHT

CAMBRAI, 1917

THE Chief of the German General Staff, General Ludendorff, has said: 'We were expecting a continuation of the attack in Flanders and on the French front, when on the 20th of November we were surprised by a fresh blow at Cambrai.'¹

In the grey dawn of that November morning 420 tanks, followed by wave upon wave of infantry, without previous artillery preparation, had nosed their ungainly way across No Man's Land from Gonnelleu to the Canal du Nord near Havrincourt and had fallen upon the enemy's wire entanglements, tearing them to shreds: then, rearing up on their 'hind legs', had fallen upon the enemy's trenches and machine-gun emplacements, crushing them to earth with their gun crews and laying bare the whole Bosche front-line system to attack by the crowds of khaki-clad

¹ In *My War Memories*, 1914-1918.

troops who buzzed about the steel monsters of war like swarms of bees.

Marcoing, Ribecourt, Havrincourt and Graincourt had fallen to us that day, and on the 21st Flesquieres, Anneux, Cantaing, Fontaine Notre Dame, Maisnieres, Noyelles and the southern exits of Bourlon Wood were ours. Then came a halt. The high ground at Bourlon Village and in the Wood of that name, as well as certain tactical features east and west of the Wood, remained in the enemy's hands. If we could not gain the Bourlon Ridge we could not hold our gains, excepting at excessive loss: we were, like the Duke of York's men, half-way up but

'neither up nor down'.

General Headquarters decided that the Ridge 'must be captured at all costs', and hurried up fresh divisions, amongst them the 2nd, which, on the 26th, was concentrated in the Lebucquiere (5th Brigade)—Doignies (6th Brigade)—Beaumontz (99th Brigade) area.

From Achiet-le-Grand, where they had de-trained on the 22nd/23rd November, the 17th Royal Fusiliers marched to Beaulencourt: by the 25th they were in Nisson huts at Lebucquiere.

At 4.30 a.m. on the 26th Divisional Headquarters issued orders to all three Brigades to relieve the 36th (Ulster) Division in the line south-west of Bourlon Village, 99th Brigade on

the right who were to take over the right sub-sector from the 107th Brigade, 6th Brigade the left, from the 109th Brigade, while the 5th Brigade was to relieve the 108th Brigade in the Hermies area and remain in Divisional Reserve: the 5th Brigade was not, however, to relieve the 108th until the 27th, though in point of fact the 17th Royal Fusiliers *did* relieve the 15th Royal Irish Rifles in the old British front line near Hermies on the night of the 26th. Then, during the next day (27th), they were detached from the 5th Brigade and attached to the 99th Brigade, moving up to Kangaroo Alley¹ where they relieved the 22nd Royal Fusiliers, the latter having been sent off to reinforce the right of the 62nd Division, which had lost heavily as a result of the fighting during the day.

Few will forget conditions in the line, when at 5 p.m. on the 26th the 2nd Division set out to relieve the 36th Division. Reconnaissance had been impossible, for only two hours' notice had been given the Division. In a heavy snowstorm the relieving troops met guides on the Bapaume-Cambrai road, who led the way, stumbling and (no doubt) cursing in the darkness, to the trenches which were at least six inches deep in liquid mud.

The situation when the 2nd Division took over the line was roughly as follows: the advance was held up by strong enemy reinforcements. Bitter

¹ The name as given in the Trench Maps.

fighting had taken place for the possession of Bournon Village and Wood, both places having changed hands several times. Most of the Wood and some of the high ground north-west of it remained in our hands, but the village was still in the enemy's possession. More to the south-east, the important heights of the village of Fontaine Notre Dame were still holding up our advance. Both sides appeared to be hurrying up new divisions and preparations were being made on our side with fresh troops to drive home our initial advantage.

An attack by the Guards and 62nd Divisions on the 27th had improved our line in the Wood and on the high ground north-west of it: almost the whole of the crest of the hill immediately west of the Wood had also been gained, but in order to safeguard the latter it was essential that the 2nd Division should not only strengthen but advance the line it had taken over, for in the centre of that line was a salient which had to be 'bitten off'. This salient the 1st King's Royal Rifles of the 99th Brigade were ordered to attack on the 28th, but the operation was subsequently postponed until 6.25 a.m. on the 29th.

On the night of the 28th/29th the 17th Royal Fusiliers moved forward to relieve the right of the King's Royal Rifles, whose line at that period was not only extraordinarily irregular, but in the event of attack almost impossible to hold.

The front line as taken over by the 99th Brigade from the 107th Brigade (36th Division) followed the line of some old German trenches which ran generally in a south-westerly to north-easterly direction north of the Bapaume-Cambrai road. This trench line, which was the main line of resistance, was on the right of the Brigade front about 1,500 yards north of the road, while on the left the distance between the trenches and the road was only about 300 yards.

The right was held by the 1st Royal Berkshires, whose right linked up with the left of the 47th Division on the Bourlon Ridge, though (as previously explained) we did not hold all of that Ridge, the north-western portion being in the hands of the enemy. The line of the Berkshires fell back in a south-westerly direction until it reached a sunken road north of the Sugar Factory which, by this time, had already become a famous landmark on the Bapaume-Cambrai road. This sunken road was the point of junction between the Berkshires and the 17th Royal Fusiliers, the inner flanks of the two Battalions forming that re-entrant which the King's Royal Rifles had been ordered to straighten out.

Coming now to the Fusiliers' sub-sector: from north-west to south-east the old Hindenburg Support Line ran through the left centre and left of the Battalion line, while on the extreme left a long sap, from 500 to 1,000 yards in length,

curled first northwards and then north-west from the main line of resistance.

This sap was known as the Rat's Tail.

On the left of the sap the 1st King's Royal Rifles continued the line to their junction with the 2nd South Staffords (of the 6th Brigade) who occupied a sub-sector east of the Canal du Nord.

Before they were relieved three companies of the Rifles held the Rat's Tail, at the top end of which was a block.

Throughout the 28th the Fusiliers spent the day in the neighbourhood of Advanced Headquarters of the 99th Brigade, which were in the old Hindenburg Support Line just south of the Bapaume-Cambrai road. Then, when darkness had fallen, they set out to relieve the Rifles: their trench strength was 20 officers and 552 other ranks.

The flash of guns and the weird glare from Very lights gave the Fusiliers some slight assistance as they filed slowly and heavily burdened up existing old German trenches, across the Bapaume-Cambrai road, thence along more trenches until the main line of resistance was reached. This main line was a shallow but continuous trench, and in what was to be the Fusiliers' sector about 600 yards in length. One company (D) took over this position. The three other companies, B, A and C, in that order, crossed the main line of resistance and staggered

on up the sap to relieve the three companies of Rifles.

'Staggered' is the only word to use, for the sap was not trench-boarded and the mud at least a foot deep: so deep and tenacious that in places men were stuck fast and had to be pulled out, the while those in rear cursed the delay, for Fritz's guns were busy and every now and then shell-bursts threw mud and soil on the relieving troops and here and there shell-splinters found a mark, when again the line would halt while the stretcher-bearers got busy and evacuated the wounded.

Before, and during, the relief the Fusiliers lost 1 officer killed (2nd Lieutenant C. W. Sherwood) and 20 other ranks killed or wounded.

At what hour the relief was finished it is impossible to say, but when the Rifles had handed over and the three companies of Fusiliers began to take stock of their surroundings it was obvious they were in a sorry position. The sap was fire-stepped to face east and west: the enemy was known to be all along the eastern side and his presence suspected on the west. No trench stores of any kind had been handed over—there were probably none to leave, for orders on such matters were very strict. One advantage (of considerable value) the sap offered: from the northern end where the block existed a commanding view of the surrounding country could be obtained.

From the block the ground on the right sloped gradually up to the crest of Bourlon Ridge: in front of it, it dipped gradually to the Canal du Nord on the left, on the western side of which Mœuvres and Inchy were visible in daylight. Some 1,800 yards north of the Rat's Tail there was a wood named Quarry Wood immediately in rear of which was a communication trench, stretching from east to west and linking up two further German trench systems, i.e. the Canal du Nord and Marquion Lines, so that in reality there were definite trench systems in existence east, north and west of the Rat's Tail—all held by the enemy. Truly, in the event of attack, the position of the Fusiliers, holding a sap 'in the air' and a main line of resistance with no depth, would not be a sinecure.

Colonel Weston established his Headquarters in a dug-out about 100 yards south of the junction between the sap and the main line of resistance.

At dawn on the 29th the King's Royal Rifles, after forming up just in front of D Company (in the main line), attacked with the intention of straightening out the re-entrant between the Fusiliers and the Royal Berkshires: they advanced about 50 yards and 250 yards on the right and left respectively, on which line they established a series of posts.

The new posts were taken over at dusk on the 29th by one-and-a-half platoons from D Company,

17th Royal Fusiliers, the relief being completed by 7 p.m.

Previously, uneasy as to the safety of the three companies in the Rat's Tail, Colonel Weston had made whatever changes in their dispositions as seemed to him most likely to be helpful in the event of an attack by the enemy: he took two platoons from B Company and kept them in reserve at Battalion Headquarters and two from C Company, placing them 100 yards in rear, and on the right flank of D Company to support the right flank.

During the afternoon the Brigadier of the 99th Infantry Brigade (to which the 17th Royal Fusiliers were still attached), accompanied by his Brigade Major, visited 17th Royal Fusiliers Headquarters to make plans for a further attack. Colonel Weston pointed out the extraordinary tactical position of his Battalion, but was told that the line was to be straightened out by the main attack (to take place on the 2nd of December), in which the 2nd Division would advance practically due north and thus level up the line.

There was nothing more to be said and the Fusiliers spent the night consolidating their position and in getting up a supply of bombs and ammunition. The work of the Battalion during the night of the 29th/30th is, indeed, practically set out in two orders to the Os.C., D and B Companies.

That to D Company states:

'You will relieve C Company, King's Royal Rifles, in the line to-night under company arrangements. The line to be taken over will run from the aeroplane at E.23.a.1.1. approximately to E.22 central.¹ If possible an advanced post will be made at E.22.b.6.1.² A patrol will first be sent forward to ascertain the possibility of this. The line will be consolidated with a series of strong posts and wired in front. Gaps will be left in the wire for patrols. Half-a-company of the D.C.L.I.³ will be at your disposal for wiring and consolidation. Tools will be handed over by the 1st King's Royal Rifles. Half-a-company, C Company, D.C.L.I., will report to you as soon as it is sufficiently dark.'

The second message, to B Company, was as follows:

'It is of vital importance to the Brigade to ascertain if the ground round E.22.a.o.o.⁴ is or is not clear of the enemy. You will send out an officers' patrol to-night to ascertain (i) the nature of the ground, (ii) the presence or absence of enemy, (iii) whether or not there is any wire which would prove an obstacle in any direction.'

There is not in existence a written report by

¹ E.22 central was roughly the centre of the Rat's Tail, and about 550 yards east of that point there was a derelict aeroplane. Actually the posts were slightly in advance of this line.

² E.22.b.6.1 was some 300 yards east of the centre of the Rat's Tail.

³ 10th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, Pioneers of the 2nd Division.

⁴ About 850 yards east of the centre of the Rat's Tail there was a small triangular trench system and E.22.a.o.o. was roughly half-way between the two.

this patrol, but it is reasonable to suppose that the impression gained by Colonel Weston that the enemy was 'lying low' on the western side of the Tat's Tail was based on information gained.

Late that night the C.O. went round the line. Very lights were going up and shells were screaming overhead, but what was very noticeable, because unusual, was the fact that the enemy's artillery were shelling the Bapaume-Cambrai road with gas shell: the German guns were obviously registering new targets. It was an ominous sign denoting more than anything else the coming of counter-attacks, which for several days had been expected. There was practically no wind and the gas fumes from the shells barely affected the Fusiliers.

Dawn broke on the 30th, and as soon as it was light enough to distinguish objects both in the air and on the ground, there came the disagreeable 'whir-r-r-r' of aeroplanes.

The C.O. was early afoot going round the line, the safety of which was still a source of worry, and he saw at least twenty hostile machines, obviously reconnoitring the British trenches. Yet the enemy's guns were silent—indeed a strange quietude seemed to hang over the lines of opposing trenches, a calm which foreboded ill.

At this stage it is interesting to quote from the 2nd Divisional narrative, which was used largely as the basis of a small pamphlet issued by orders

of General Headquarters, entitled *The Story of a Great Fight*, which describes something of the happenings of that day of heroic deeds:

‘The narrative so far brings us to the morning of the 30th of November and has tended to show how from the first day in the line all had worked hard to restore order to a line which had been taken over hurriedly during operations, and to replace chaos by organization. Had it not been for this it is doubtful whether, when the storm broke on the Divisional front on the 30th November, the line could have been maintained and the concentrated attacks of three German divisions beaten off with most severe losses to the enemy.

‘The subsequent story is one so brimful of heroism that it deserves to take its place in English history for all time and to be a proud day in the lives of all those splendid British soldiers who, by their single-hearted devotion to duty, saved what would have been undoubtedly a catastrophe had they given way.’

* * * * *

At 9 a.m. there was a sudden roar from the Bosche guns and a very heavy bombardment fell upon the whole of the 2nd Division front. At first, however, the savage rain of shell fell well over the heads of the Fusiliers, on to, and in the neighbourhood of, the Bapaume-Cambrai road.

Immediately, Colonel Weston rang up B Company, but failed to get on. He then got through to A Company, commanded by Captain Walter Napleton Stone. That officer informed the C.O. that the enemy was massing ‘in squares 15, 16 and 17’ (which interpreted meant along the whole of the 2nd Divisional front, including

Mœuvres). He also said that the enemy was even then on the move and advancing in a southeasterly direction, in column of fours, with field guns coming up behind.

The S.O.S. was sent up and the C.O. tried to get on to the Divisional artillery, but here again the telephone wires had gone. Immediately after, Colonel Weston succeeded in getting through to 99th Brigade Headquarters, and was told by the Brigade Major that the gunners had already been informed. The C.O. then suggested that the attack was 'a big show': also that he should reorganize on the main line of resistance as the Rat's Tail would be untenable. The G.O.C., 99th Brigade (Brigadier-General R. O. Kellett), then spoke on the telephone and ordered Colonel Weston to re-form on the main line.

At 9.30 a.m. the C.O. rang up Captain Stone and ordered him to withdraw three platoons of his company to the main line, leaving one as a rearguard: he also asked Captain Stone to tell Lieutenant S. Benzecry (B Company) to withdraw to the main line with three platoons, leaving one as rearguard: this rearguard was to hold on as long as possible: an officer would meet him at the junction of the main line and the Rat's Tail to direct him into position: he must consolidate on the main line in depth.¹

¹ Extract from Colonel Weston's report to 99th Brigade Headquarters.

Captain Stone then told the C.O. that the enemy had deployed and had disappeared in the dead ground: the dead ground lay on the northern side of the Bourlon-Mœuvres road, 800 to 1,000 yards north of the Rat's Tail.

Outside Colonel Weston's Headquarters the enemy's artillery fire had increased in volume, shells in greater number went shrieking overhead or fell in the neighbourhood: machine-gun bullets, like a hailstorm, whistled through the air: pandemonium reigned. Lieutenant McHaffie, the Intelligence Officer, was sent off to the point of junction between the Rat's Tail and the main line, with instructions to put A Company in the centre and B on the left. The Regimental Sergeant-Major, then at Battalion Headquarters, was ordered to take some Pioneers (of the D.C.L.I.) and establish a block about 100 yards north of C Company's Headquarters, from whom he was to take the necessary garrison.

Next came the issue of orders to the Battalion generally:

'All ranks were to be very sparing of ammunition: that they would wait until the enemy were quite close and that they would hold on to the main line at all costs. C and D Companies were informed over the telephone of the situation and the former ordered to hold on where they were and hold the block at all costs.'

At 10 a.m. the Brigade Major rang up and asked Colonel Weston for confirmation of the

statement that the enemy was bringing up artillery. All attempts to get on to Captain Stone (who had given this information) failed, but just as the C.O. had hung up the receiver a runner arrived at Battalion Headquarters with the startling news that Captain Stone had been killed and that the Bosche was all round the sap.

The narrative so far has dealt only with Battalion Headquarters, the issue of very necessary orders, and the situation as appreciated there. Meanwhile, what had happened in the front line? What had transpired during that fatal period between 9 a.m. and 10.30 a.m.?

The enemy had determined to retake the ground lost by him between the 20th and the 28th of November. For this purpose he had hurried up fresh divisions and had massed a great number of guns and trench mortars to knock our defences to pieces before his infantry attacked. Our line from west of Vendhuille to Mœuvres formed a huge salient: this salient he had determined to break on the southern and northern flanks, pinching off the centre. The southern attack, made with great numbers of troops in massed formation, after a short but violent bombardment, was launched between the hours of 7 and 8 a.m. on the 30th. The northern attack, also made with prodigious forces, took place at 9 a.m. or shortly after.

As already stated, Captain Stone at 9 a.m. had

informed his C.O. that the enemy was massing along the whole front from Bourlon Ridge to (and including) Mœuvres. The last message from that gallant officer appears to have been about 9.30 a.m., when he told Colonel Weston that the enemy, having advanced in a south-easterly direction, had disappeared in dead ground along the Battalion front.

It was then that the three platoons of A Company and the two platoons of B, covered by the rearguard companies of one platoon of A and one of B, climbed up out of the sap and began to fall back to the main line as ordered.

Captain Stone and Lieutenant Benzecry, though ordered to withdraw with their men, elected to stay with the rearguard.

A and B Companies had scarcely begun to move back across the open when all of a sudden the enemy, in massed formation, seemed to be all round the sap. At once every rifle and Lewis gun, which could be brought to bear upon the enemy, opened fire. The Bosche front line went down, shot to pieces: the next came on and suffered a similar fate.

The gallant rearguard, faced with no hope of escape, but with splendid devotion to duty, covered the retirement of their comrades, and encouraged by the two heroic officers who had chosen to stay with their men, even unto death, fired steadily and coolly at the enemy.

Some men took even to counting their hits. 'One—two—three—four.'

In addition, the Divisional artillery had 'got on' to the enemy and were killing Bosche in bunches.¹ Masses of Germans, as they topped the crest of the Bourlon Ridge, were swept away by fire from the field guns: not for a long while had the gunners been given such splendid targets, and the enemy's losses were enormous.

The rearguard still continued to fire steadily: 'Five—six—seven—eight.'

All round was a surging mass of grey-clad figures, struggling to get to grips with the Fusiliers: all round, the ground was covered with inert or writhing bodies: loud guttural shouts, cries and groans, hoarse commands filled the air: the grey masses drew nearer the gallant rearguard. To the fire of Lewis gun and rifle was now added the hurling of bombs—so close had the Bosche pressed. From the north, from the east and from the west the infuriated enemy swarmed upon the heroic men who had put up such a wonderful fight and stout defence that the reorganization of the main line of defence had been completed before the end came.

¹ The 99th Brigade Headquarters diary speaks of the 'exceedingly valuable reports received from O.C., 17th Royal Fusiliers, holding that portion of our front, with the result that our artillery fire was brought to bear on the enemy at the earliest moment'.

With bullet, with bomb and at last with bayonet, which so clearly mark the stages of the enemy's slow, but bloody advance, that gallant little band of Fusiliers fought the Bosche and then died to a man—there were no survivors. How gallant Captain Stone, who had, however, lived long enough to carry out his orders, met his end is recorded below: of the heroic Benzecry—blood was already pouring from a wound in his head before he too fell dead, fighting to the last.

'Of the heroism of the rearguard,' wrote Colonel Weston in his subsequent report, 'it is difficult to speak.' Difficult, because mere words could not express what the living thought of the dead. Individual deeds of sacrifice and noble devotion to duty were not rare during the War, but the immortal story of that rearguard of Fusiliers, the supreme sacrifice of two platoons under such circumstances which enabled the Battalion to reorganize the line and utterly defeat the attacks of a vastly superior enemy, thereby saving the whole front from giving way (for if the centre of the Divisional front had gone the flanks must have gone also), was the talk of the Division for many days and weeks: the fame of the 17th Royal Fusiliers travelled far, they had added another glorious page to the History of the Regiment, whose past was already brilliant with many a gallant action.

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unaware at 11.45 a.m. lived long. C.O. despatched reconnaissance where the platoons in reserve. He also sent (a.m.) to the C.O.

"You will hold the main line of resistance (from about three sap as it originally east). The attack of A, B and C from of resistance in rear right in touch with B will be on the left Consolidation will be

Regimental Sergeant at Battalion Headquarters. Weston that the Rat's Tail pressed. T. again with junctionance

to bear on the enemy. Shattered pieces were ever they got to of the Fusiliers, the grey hordes continued to press on, wave deadly rifle fire which met them down in bunches seemed to have effect, for others stepped into the they seemed to get no nearer.

had no sooner reported the centre in the Signalling Officer—2nd ley—reported to Colonel Weston held by the King's Royal Rifles that the Bosche was in the line held by the Rifles.

extreme right of his line already gone now threatened, the C.O. took personal action to defend his position new danger. Hastily collecting able man, even the servants, he in the trench which ran south-Battalion Headquarters to the Bapa road and placed an N.C.O. at the to turn back any man who ran back trench. Headquarters were also put of defence. He then prepared to maps and papers, but first sent off the message (timed 11.50 a.m.) to 99th Headquarters:

is still holding. Judging by the line of the enemy's could say that my left flank 1st K.R.R.s had gone.

Both Captain Stone and Lieutenant Benzecry were recommended for the Victoria Cross for their splendid devotion to duty, but the decoration was conferred only on the former officer.¹

* * * * *

The northern end of the Rat's Tail, that is about 300 yards of it, had by 10.30 a.m. fallen to the enemy, and the two platoons forming the rearguard had apparently already met their heroic death when the runner dashed into Colonel Weston's Headquarters between 10 and 10.30 a.m. stating that Captain Stone had been killed and that the enemy was all round the sap.

Realizing that the situation was critical and

¹ The official citation, which appeared in the *London Gazette* of the 13th of February, 1918, stated: 'For most conspicuous bravery when in command of a company in an isolated position one thousand yards in front of the main line and overlooking the enemy's positions. He observed the enemy massing for an attack and reported valuable information to Battalion Headquarters. He was ordered to withdraw his company, leaving a rearguard to cover the withdrawal. The attack developing with unexpected speed, Captain Stone sent three platoons back and remained with the rearguard himself. He stood on the parapet with the telephone under a tremendous bombardment, observing the enemy and continued to send back valuable information until the wire was cut by his orders. The rearguard was eventually surrounded and cut to pieces and Captain Stone was seen fighting to the last, till he was shot through the head. The extraordinary coolness of this officer and the accuracy of his information enabled dispositions to be made just in time to save the line and avert disaster.'

unaware at that period that Captain Stone had lived long enough to carry out his orders, the C.O. despatched 2nd Lieutenant Hughes to reconnoitre the front and, having ascertained where the main line was weakest, lead the two platoons in reserve there and hold on at all costs. He also sent the following message (timed 10.35 a.m.) to the O.C., D Company:

'You will hold on to your present line at all costs. The main line of resistance will be from E.22 b.8.2 to E.22 b.o.2 (from about three hundred yards from the northern end of the sap as it originally existed thence about four hundred yards due east). The attack is a pretty big one. I am withdrawing most of A, B and C from the Rat's Tail to consolidate the main line of resistance in rear of you. In the main line C will be on the right in touch with the Berkshires. A will be in the centre. B will be on the left in touch with the King's Royal Rifles. Consolidation will be in depth on the main line of resistance.'

Regimental Sergeant-Major Haines reported at Battalion Headquarters and informed Colonel Weston that the block had been established in the Rat's Tail by C Company, but was hard pressed. The C.O. then sent the R.S.M. back again with orders to form another block at the junction of the sap with the main line of resistance: also, to send to the Brigade dump and collect all the ammunition and bombs he could find. Next, rapidly sketching the dispositions of his Battalion, the C.O. sent by runner (all telephonic communication having broken down) this message to Brigade Headquarters:

'My line now established as per attached map. Have obtained touch with K.R.R. on left. Have no information about touch on the right. Can obtain no further news about enemy bringing up artillery as the officer . . .¹ The Bosche are now on the crest of the hill at E.22.b.5.2.² I doubt if my line will hold. Have blocked trench at E.22.c.9.15. and am holding up Bosche there. My main line has gone from about E.22.d.5.8. Am preparing a defensive flank down the trench from E.22.c.9.2. to road.'

At 11 a.m. both B and D Companies reported that the line had been established, but that owing to lack of ammunition they were holding on with difficulty.

Next came a report to Battalion Headquarters from C Company stating that through lack of bombs the centre block in the Rat's Tail had gone. For the Bosche was on three sides, too close almost for rifle shooting and only bombs could beat him back up the sap. It is difficult to give an adequate pen picture of all the details of that grim struggle, but seldom had such a surging mass of Germans, desperate in their efforts to overwhelm the gallant Fusiliers, been dealt with more effectively.

The situation of companies was now as follows: C Company held what remained of the sap; A, B and D were in the main line of resistance. Every available rifle, Lewis gun and machine

¹ The sentence is incomplete in the original message in Colonel Weston's note-book.

² For these co-ordinates, see sketch-map.

gun was brought to bear on the enemy. Shattered and shot to pieces ere ever they got to within 200 yards of the Fusiliers, the grey hordes nevertheless still continued to press on, wave after wave. The deadly rifle fire which met them and brought them down in bunches seemed to have but a temporary effect, for others stepped into the gap—yet always they seemed to get no nearer.

C Company had no sooner reported the centre block gone than the Signalling Officer—2nd Lieutenant Kiteley—reported to Colonel Weston that the left flank held by the King's Royal Rifles had gone and that the Bosche was in the line which had been held by the Rifles.

With the extreme right of his line already gone and his left now threatened, the C.O. took immediate personal action to defend his position against this new danger. Hastily collecting every available man, even the servants, he stationed them in the trench which ran southwards from Battalion Headquarters to the Bapaume-Cambrai road and placed an N.C.O. at the bottom end to turn back any man who ran back down the trench. Headquarters were also put into a state of defence. He then prepared to burn all maps and papers, but first sent off the following message (timed 11.50 a.m.) to 99th Brigade Headquarters:

'My line is still holding. Judging by the line of the enemy's advance I should say that my left flank 1st K.R.R.s had gone.

Have made defensive flank to road but want reinforcements and above all ammunition. Am neither in touch on right flank or left flank, but my line is holding. Ammunition urgent.'

Desperate now was the situation; bombs had given out, rifle ammunition so precious that every round almost seemed to be the last. Then a miracle happened! 'At this critical moment', records the narrative, 'a supply of bombs and ammunition arrived.' A gallant carrying party of the Cornwalls, almost exhausted by their super-human struggle across shell-torn ground and up communication trenches packed with traffic and deep in mud, staggered in with their welcome loads. Boxes were literally torn open and their contents handed round quickly. Even then the distribution was all too slow, for, seeing the desperate need of his comrades, C Company's cook jumped up on the parapet, his arms full of bandoliers which he hurled to all the men around him. Gallant fellow—his name is forgotten but not his splendid efforts!

With bombs now available Lieutenant Forbes Menzies organized a bombing party, led it himself, fell upon the enemy and drove him back up the sap two hundred yards to the block at E.22.c.9.9.

From this time onwards the situation improved, for on sending out a message to the flank companies that they must at all costs find out the position on *their* flanks, B replied that the 1st

King's Royal Rifles were still holding out, and D that they were in touch with the Berkshires.

At 12.10 p.m., therefore, Colonel Weston sent back another message to Brigade Headquarters:

'My line is still holding. K.R.R. line on my left is still holding. No men of the Berks on my right. Am urgently in need of bombs to hold the block and ammunition. The German guns are lengthening their range. *My men are in fine fettle*, but it is a question of whether you can get me bombs and ammunition and reinforcements before the next enemy attack. I have only about six officers left and my casualties are very heavy. One of our "heavies" is still firing short by Battalion Headquarters.'

At about 1 p.m. there was a distinct lull in the fighting—a pause which gave the hard-pressed Fusiliers breathing space, during which company commanders hurried back to Battalion Headquarters to report the situation on their immediate fronts and flanks. They stated that everywhere the line was intact and touch obtained on their flanks, their one fear being lest they should again run out of bombs and ammunition. D Company stated that, with the exception of one on the right flank at E.23.c.1.7, under 2nd Lieutenant Doncaster (which gallantly held out all day), *their advanced posts had gone*. They reported also that the slaughter of the enemy at close quarters had been enormous, and that the men were in fine spirits, though both A and D Companies had lost

very heavily in getting back to the main line and during the re-forming.

The C.O. then ordered them, on returning to their companies, to consolidate in depth if possible, to make the men clean their rifles, form dumps of bombs and ammunition and prepare for the next attack; above all to watch their flanks and make a defensive flank if necessary.

Having dismissed his company commanders back to their positions, he sent another message back to the Brigade:

'Am in touch with K.R.R. on my left. Am in touch with the 23rd Royal Fusiliers on my right.¹ My main line of resistance is holding firm, but I have not sufficient men left to consolidate in depth. The enemy now holds the line captured by K.R.R. yesterday (approximately). The enemy appear to be consolidating on this line, also in front of the K.R.R. on my left. Apparently the attack did not reach the K.R.R. on my left. See attached map for general situation.² No reinforcements, bombs or ammunition have yet arrived.'

This message was followed by yet another, a little later and before the next attack came:

'My officers are quite confident that they can hold the line with more ammunition. The men of course are very exhausted, as they fought with the Germans with the bayonet, but full of fight still. One company fought with the bayonet until only twenty men were left. My line is now rather mixed with K.R.R. and 23rd R.F. Our guns are shooting short at E.22.b.9.o. which is my right flank and where I still have a

¹ It will be remembered that the 23rd Royal Fusiliers were in reserve in the neighbourhood of the Sugar Factory.

² This most important map is, unfortunately, missing.

post. Can you send me a 3-inch Stokes mortar gun as I have found a dump of ammunition? It would help me to defend my double block.'

Just before this message was despatched a small supply of ammunition had arrived.

Being nervous of his left flank, Colonel Weston then asked the King's Royal Rifles to strengthen their line, with which request the Rifles complied forthwith.

All ranks now awaited the next attack, but the Bosche was evidently taking a considerable 'breather', for at 2.30 p.m. the line was still comparatively quiet. It was getting near 3 p.m. when the C.O. sent back his sixth message to 99th Brigade Headquarters:

'The situation remains unchanged. The enemy's aeroplanes are once more up in large numbers. I have only five Lewis guns left in action. I have no brigade machine guns, as far as I can gather, left in action. I have heard no word from the Brigade since the action commenced.¹ A reliable sergeant

¹ All Colonel Weston's messages had been sent back to Advanced Headquarters of the 99th Brigade. The diary of that Brigade Headquarters states that: 'Direct hits with 5.9s were made on the Advanced Report Centre at E.28.b.40.25, causing casualties to the signallers and necessitating the removal of the signal exchange. Communication was sustained only under the most trying circumstances, and soon it was found impossible to maintain a line to the right battalion in the Sugar Factory, a line laid to this place being cut by shell-fire in two or more places, in many cases before the linesman had reached the building. By 11.30 a.m. all telephone lines to the Brigade Headquarters were disconnected.'

reports to me that the Bosche look as if they are about to attack again on my left where the K.R.R. are holding the line.'

And as a footnote to this message the following words are added: 'I had already asked K.R.R. about half an hour ago to consolidate their line in depth. Their men have not yet arrived, but should do so at any moment.'

Came 3 o'clock, then 3.30 p.m. A few minutes later the C.O., 17th Royal Fusiliers, received information that the enemy was forming up for another attack. This information Colonel Weston sent back to Brigade Headquarters not only by runner but by pigeon. This message (the seventh) was worded as follows:

'Company commander on my right flank reports that the enemy are preparing for another attack. He is shooting at him as he is forming up. We shall hold on at all costs. This information comes from a reliable source.'

This message was sent off at 3.40 p.m., by which time the enemy had launched another great attack.

Once more the grey masses swarmed across the Bourslon Ridge and advanced from all three sides of the Rat's Tail; they came on almost shoulder to shoulder—a fine sight indeed but sheer madness—bearing down on the line held by the devoted Fusiliers. Sheets of flame leapt from the main line, the raucous barking of Lewis-gun fire added to that of rifle fire. Down went

the Bosche in dozens, in scores, inert and writhing bodies added their number to the countless dead and wounded already lying out in front of that fearsome No Man's Land.

From the block in the sap a Brigade machine gun, under Corporal Warwick, did magnificent service, and terrible was the toll taken of the enemy, caught in flank and shot down, wave after wave. Around this block the struggle waged furiously; the roar of gun-fire was terrific. The men's rifles got so hot that they could scarcely be held. The tenacity of the Fusiliers was extraordinary; they were actually enjoying the novel experience of shooting down Bosche at close quarters in vast numbers.

The enemy appeared to realize that until he had captured the block further advance was impossible, but every movement towards it meant death, for Lieutenant Forbes Menzies had posted snipers to shoot down every German who showed himself.

There was one German who all day long had been conspicuous in leading the enemy attacks. He was a brave fellow, for to face the storm of the well-aimed rifle fire which the Fusiliers poured upon the enemy needed the highest courage. They were stout fellows those Germans, but they had to deal with those whose hearts and courage were stouter still!

Eventually a Fusilier sniper brought down that

German which took the sting out of the enemy's attack, and again, for the time being, he fell back sullenly, as a lion might do, licking its wounds before leaping finally upon its quarry. By this time, however, the Battalion, battered, exhausted and terribly weak through the loss of many gallant fellows, knew instinctively that the Bosche was beaten. The sense of victory is sometimes difficult to analyse, for by all the accepted rules of warfare the Fusiliers should have been wiped out, swept away by that grey avalanche. But, with the main line of resistance intact to give them confidence, they felt that the enemy had been utterly defeated, as indeed he had been. One more effort he made, and that is reported in Colonel Weston's eighth message (sent off at 4.25 p.m.) to Brigade Headquarters:

'Enemy is counter-attacking heavily down trench leading to 22 Central. If you can get a battery on this trench from 22a.9.4 to 22c.8.8 we shall wipe them out. The trench is full of Bosche. My blocks are still holding. My right company reports that they had a man in from the 47th Division. They suspect him of being a spy as he has disappeared.'

And there is a footnote to that message giving the following information: 'Have just got on direct to artillery and arranged for them to plaster the trench in question.'

And plaster the trench they did! Down from the northern end of the Rat's Tail—all their gain

for the terrific loss of life incurred throughout the day—the Germans advanced in great numbers. Right into the grey masses our shells fell—the carnage was awful, horrible, and in a little while, frustrated and broken and utterly defeated, the enemy fell back.

‘This’, records the C.O. of the 17th Royal Fusiliers in his report, ‘was the final effort, and for the rest of the evening not a movement was heard.’

Among the concluding remarks of this report are these words:

‘It may be said that the difficulty of re-forming in the face of an enemy attack of this magnitude was stupendous, and that the heroism of the rearguard alone made this possible. The loss of ammunition and supplies during the re-forming was severely felt. The success of the day was undoubtedly due to the perfect calmness of all officers and men. There were no signs of panic. On the contrary all ranks displayed the fixed determination to die at their posts. The normal result ensued and *it was the enemy who died* trying to get to these posts. The least sign of loss of nerve would have heralded a disaster, as it was as soon as they had settled down, the men became intoxicated with the joy of shooting the enemy at point-blank range.’

Then follow tributes to several officers: to Captain Glasson, the officer responsible for the consolidation of the main line and maintenance of touch on the flanks; to Captain and Adjutant A. W. Lavarack, for ‘the suggestions that he made and the coolness that he maintained [which]

were of invaluable assistance to me, especially as both my signalling and intelligence officers were wounded earlier in the fighting'; and to the Battalion Medical Officer, Captain Moir, R.A.M.C., 'for the efficiency and speed with which all the wounded were cleared'.

But it was to the heroism of the rearguard that all men turned their thoughts that night. To that great and noble example of devotion to duty—the giving of their lives for others.¹

To those gallant officers and men, upon whose dead bodies the darkness of night was now falling, Life had been a sweet and precious thing: they had wives and homes and little children, or perhaps an aged parent dear to them; they too had loved the rising up of the sun and the evening mists which fell upon some corner of the earth 'Forever England', but for the sake of duty, giving, as if it were a natural thing to do, their very lives, they yielded all.

Well, indeed, do Laurence Binyon's lovely

¹ The Battalion diary gives the following list of casualties: Killed—Captain W. N. Stone, Lieutenant Solomon Benzecry, 2nd Lieutenant Cyril Yellen, 2nd Lieutenant Arthur Sherwood; Missing—2nd Lieutenant Arthur Cocker (afterwards reported as 'killed' 30/11/17); Wounded—2nd Lieutenants John Lucas (died of wounds 28/12/17), Edward Chittenden, William McHaffie, Frank Kiteley, Albert McGregor and Ernest Barber—total 11 officers. Losses in other ranks were 167 killed and wounded. The Battalion came out of the line at a trench strength of 20 officers and 351 other ranks.

words befit this deeply-touching and enthralling story:

'They shall not grow old as we who are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We shall remember them.'

* * * * *

Came dusk and the growing darkness and Colonel Weston's last message to 99th Brigade Headquarters on that still, quiet evening of the 30th of November was: 'The situation is once more normal. I think the Bosche is relieving now. My relief has not yet arrived but is expected at every moment.'

But what a day and what a fight! ¹

It was 10 p.m. before the 24th Royal Fusiliers relieved the 17th Battalion, and the latter, drawing out at last from this abode of death, marched back

¹ The following decorations were awarded for gallantry and distinguished conduct on the 30th November, 1917:

Bar to D.S.O.—Lieut.-Colonel S. V. P. Weston; D.S.O.—Lieutenant A. Forbes Menzies; M.C.—Captain L. M. Glasson, 2nd Lieutenants W. J. Lucas, W. F. Hughes, C. F. Doncaster; Bar to D.C.M.—R.S.M. A. Haines; D.C.M.—Sergeant A. Dray, Corporal W. T. Wynne; M.M.—Sergeant J. K. Benson, Corporal G. Silcock, Lance-Sergeant B. Doherty, Private H. J. Pears, Corporal G. Stanley, Private S. Bishopp, Lance-Corporal F. C. Gunson, Private R. Gibson, Lance-Sergeant W. Grindrod, Lance-Corporal H. S. Gardner, Sergeant F. Grimes, Private W. C. Muttitt, Private C. Bradford; Bar to M.M.—Private C. J. Aaron.

to what is described as 'K.14', meaning a position west of the Canal du Nord and south-west of Lock 7.

On the 1st December, the G.O.C. 99th Brigade (Brig.-General R. O. Kellett) sent the following note to Colonel Weston:

MY DEAR WESTON,

Words can in no way express my thanks to and admiration of you and your magnificent battalion for your splendid behaviour throughout the enemy attack of yesterday.

You bore the brunt of the attack, and the divisional commander tells me that ten successive waves of Germans attempted to break through our line.

Please convey my very deep thanks to my old comrades of the 17th with whom I served for 7 months in England.

You have covered yourself with glory in every action you have taken part in.

As for yourself—your leading and conduct of affairs could not be surpassed, and your information (most of which unfortunately miscarried and only reached me at midnight last night) was more than helpful.

Yours ever,

R. O. KELLETT

(Brigadier Commanding 99th Brigade).

XII

FROM THE BOURLON

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salient formed by our advance began to fall back covered by rearguards and posts. For, although along the north-western front of the Bosche counter-attack, i.e. from Bourlon Wood to Mœuvres, the enemy had failed dismally to gain anything but a few hundred yards of ground, on the southern (or eastern) front of his attack he had pushed our line back a considerable distance from opposite Vendhuille northwards to the Scheldt Canal south of Masnieres.

It was evident, therefore, that only by prolonged and severe fighting could our line on the Bonavis Ridge be established, and until this was done the situation of our troops north of Flesquieres would be difficult and dangerous. Faced with the alternatives of either embarking on another offensive on a large scale or a withdrawal to a more compact line on the Flesquieres Ridge, Sir Douglas Haig selected the latter expedient. Accordingly orders were issued to begin the withdrawal on the night of the 4th/5th of December.

The following incident which happened on the 4th while the G.O.C., 2nd Division, was selecting a position for his new main line shows that General Pereira was not one to 'sit tight' at Divisional Headquarters.

'I went forward with W. . . .', he says in his private diary, 'to reconnoitre a position for a new main line. There is so much fine wire that I was anxious to fit as much as I could into

our new system, but we followed the wrong spur and the wrong lot of wire, and instead of walking *parallel* with the Bosche we had been going straight *towards* their positions and we were heavily sniped. There was a trench not far off and we got through the wire in record time and found ourselves with a support company of the 51st Division. We got back to the line we originally intended to look at and finished our reconnaissance. Home via 5th Brigade Headquarters in Lock 7 and 99th Brigade Headquarters in Graincourt and back by the Canal. Altogether a twelve-mile tour on foot.'

The 17th Royal Fusiliers were in the line for five more days before they were relieved. That period was full of excitement. The Battalion diary records on the 4th of December:

'Retired to a line in front of Lock 7, which in a few days will be our front and main line of resistance. The retirement has already begun. Guns in front of us going back, destruction of dug-outs, etc. The Battalion working at utmost pressure to consolidate the line.'

General Pereira in his diary states that:

'The withdrawal to the new line was successfully carried out during the night (4th/5th). We have a covering line west of Graincourt and about one thousand yards south of the Cambrai-Bapaume road. This covers our outpost line which is being made into our front system of trenches with the main line to support it.'

The 5th Brigade held the forward position and the front system to which the troops were falling back; the 99th Brigade was in support and the 6th Brigade in reserve.

'All battalions worked very hard', said the G.O.C., 'and the withdrawal to the covering line worked very smoothly. All material was brought back. Dug-outs were destroyed by gun-cotton charges and "P" bombs were thrown in to set them alight, and all were reported as burning merrily after we had gone back.'

During the 5th the Bosche discovered the withdrawal and immediately began to advance, though cautiously as if fearing a trap. Our artillery got on to masses of the enemy with unhappy results to the latter. At 11.30 a.m. the Fusiliers reported that he put down a heavy barrage on Boursies, north-east of the Divisional front, and attacked in conjunction with another push further south.

The position held by the Fusiliers was a portion of the Hindenburg Main Line¹ where plenty of deep dug-outs were found.

On the 6th the enemy was seen advancing in small parties along the line, and at 10 a.m. the rearguard withdrew through the main line of resistance:

'Our rearguard withdrew through us', records the Fusiliers, 'and we became front-line troops.'

At 1 a.m. on the 7th the Battalion received orders to establish three posts roughly 500 yards in front of the line; these posts were to be held at all costs.

¹ The Battalion diary states the 'Hindenburg Support Line', but this is an obvious error when Lock 7 is located on the map.

The Sappers were supposed to be digging the posts. In the darkness these posts could not be found, but at daybreak they were sited and manned.

The Bosche artillery was busy that night, and 2nd Lieutenant Waters, going up with a carrying party, was wounded. The Battalion Transport Lines at Velu Wood were also shelled and Company-Quartermaster-Sergeant J. Mead was wounded, dying later of his wounds—a sad loss. 'He was one of the most popular N.C.O.'s in the Battalion', records the diary of the Fusiliers, 'and won the Military Medal at Beaumont Hamel.'

It was strange how one's best-loved comrades always seemed to meet death. Perhaps it was that those very attributes which drew men to them were responsible also for a fearless courage and a disregard of danger which often ended fatally.

At 7 p.m. on the 7th the Bosche was reported in Lock 6. At 9 a.m. the following morning the Fusiliers were in touch with small parties of the enemy. Two N.C.O.'s—Lance-Corporals Whitson and Lowry—made a gallant attempt to capture a party of seven Germans, but the latter ran faster than the two Fusiliers and escaped.

The 8th was an uncomfortable day, for every now and then bombing fights broke out. During the afternoon two posts were lost, but as the

G.O.C. records, 'they were very much in the air and I decided not to recapture them'.

The enemy had been active west of the canal all day, and at night his guns registered the newly-established front line and shelled the latter heavily.

Desultory fighting and bombing again broke out on the morning of the 9th and continued throughout most of the day. Later the enemy was reported massing in front of the Fusiliers but does not appear to have attacked. His trench mortars had arrived and he gave the Battalion an uncomfortable time. Little could be done by the latter as their trench mortars had not yet arrived.

But at last, that night, relief came. The 17th Middlesex arrived and took over the line (a frontage of over 2,000 yards) held by the Fusiliers, the latter marching back to a camp of Nissen huts at Labucquiere.

It was a very tired and exhausted battalion which reached camp that night. A tour of fourteen days in the line 'during which the Battalion had fought the fiercest battle in its history, undertaken constant reliefs and continuous minor enterprises against the enemy's finest troops', was enough to test the strength and fighting qualities of any troops. But the Fusiliers had emerged triumphant, though sadly depleted.

'On all occasions it has done magnificently

and returns to a well-earned rest and the highest praise from the Divisional and Brigade (both 99th and 5th) Commanders.' ¹

And what their Divisional Commander (who, be it remembered, had been through the whole course of the War from August, 1914) thought of them is well expressed in his own words: "Weston has made them into a real fighting unit.'

¹ Battalion Diary.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAST WINTER IN THE TRENCHES: 1917-18

NISSEN huts were semicircular contrivances of corrugated iron, the interiors hot as a furnace in summer and in winter like an ice-box, only the 'fuggy' atmosphere from smoky braziers conveying warmth to the shivering inhabitants. Several of these huts in Velu Wood housed the Fusiliers for a day or two, but their 'well-earned rest' seemed as all 'rests' were—a snare and a delusion.

The 10th was occupied in scraping the mud from clothing and equipment and in taking hot baths; clean underclothing was then issued. The usual kit inspection on coming out of the line took place. The weather was bitterly cold.

The following day companies were reorganized on a two-platoon basis, for no reinforcements had arrived to swell the depleted ranks of the Battalion. On the 14th the Battalion worked on the support line near Hermies, and at dusk moved

into the village, in Brigade Reserve, relieving the 17th Middlesex.

In Hermies the accommodation was good for which the Fusiliers were grateful, for the next five days were spent in supplying working parties, and at night it was a blessing to have a decent place in which to 'doss'.

The 20th, however, saw the Battalion once more back in the front line, having relieved the 24th Royal Fusiliers for a six days' tour in the left-battalion sector of the left (5th) Brigade front.

The 2nd Divisional front line at this period ran from east to west in a somewhat irregular line from the Hindenburg Support Line east of the Canal du Nord to about 900 yards north of Lock 7 (right Brigade front) to the Demicourt-Mœuvres road and about 900 yards east of Boursies.

Snow covered the ground, and, with a frontage of some 2,000 yards to protect, the situation was no sinecure. Out in front of the line were four posts, each about 300 yards from the front line—the main line of resistance as it was termed. But even at this date the enemy had not apparently discovered the exact position of his opponents, and his line was in places 800 yards away.

The trenches occupied by the Fusiliers were fairly good and clean, but were not deep enough;

out in front a continuous belt of wire had already been erected, affording good protection.

Taking the situation generally, both sides were settling down to new positions, and when this happened there was plenty of work to do, much patrolling to be carried out, the hindrance as far as possible of opposing working parties and necessary raids for the purpose of securing identifications. That is the sort of life which lay before the 17th Royal Fusiliers for the next three months; trench-life of a strenuous character and yet, with the exception of encounters with hostile patrols and the making or repelling of raids, no actual fighting on a large scale took place. The happenings of that period may, therefore, be summarized, only those things which closely concerned the life of the Battalion being mentioned.

On the morning of the 21st a party of thirty Germans tried to raid a post covering the western flank of the Battalion, but only succeeded in leaving one prisoner in the hands of the Fusiliers, after being beaten off with loss. A new kind of automatic pistol was found on the ground after the discomfited Bosche had been chased back to his lines. This pistol had a magazine containing thirty-two rounds, but unfortunately the weapon had been damaged by our fire. The Battalion diary, in relating this incident, adds ironically that: 'It is interesting to note that the enemy

failed to "pinch off" our post owing to the fact that they forgot to pull the strings of their bombs before throwing'.

At this time the Brigadier ordered the Fusiliers to form what was to be known as a 'Fighting Patrol'; the men were carefully selected and did excellent service.

On Christmas Day a service was held in Battalion Headquarters dug-out—ten men per company attending. The Regimental Sergeant-Major (Mr. A. Haines) was wounded on Christmas Night. He was standing with his servant and a bugler at the entrance to his dug-out when a shell splinter struck him. 'His loss is deeply felt,' records the diary.

On Boxing Day the Battalion was relieved and moved back to Sanders Camp.

During their tour in the line only six men were evacuated sick though the weather had been very severe; issues of hot drinks at night and cocoa at early morning was largely responsible for keeping down sickness.

Sanders Camp was a wretched place—uncompleted and with no conveniences, yet somehow or other baths were provided; all arrangements were also made for Christmas dinners. The officers had theirs first on the 28th, then A and B Companies on the 29th and C and D on the 30th. Turkeys, geese and plum puddings were supplied out of canteen funds. On the 31st

the Signallers, Runners and Details had their dinner.¹

The year 1917 closed with the Battalion at a ration strength of 24 officers and 489 other ranks. Casualties suffered during December were 6 other ranks killed and 2nd Lieutenant F. G. Waters and 25 other ranks wounded.

The 1st of January, 1918, dawned with hard frost still on the ground and physical training and active forms of exercise were alone possible. On the 3rd the following are recorded as having been 'mentioned' in the New Year's Honours: '2nd Lieutenant H. S. Havelock and 2nd Lieutenant A. F. Menzies, R.Q.M.S. T. Brunton, C.S.M. H. Matthews and Sergeant C. Luke.'

The Battalion on the 3rd moved to Beaulencourt with no regrets at all at leaving Sanders Camp, where it was almost impossible to keep the men warm, though a startling innovation in the form of permission to collect wood from French villages for burning purposes added

¹ Mr. B. B. Pidcock (late C.Q.M.S. D Company) adds the following interesting note:

'Although under orders to move at an hour or two's notice all Companies had excellent dinners spreading over the nights of December 29th, 30th, 31st. The Canteen Fund had enabled good supplies of turkeys, etc., to be purchased. The Battalion had an excellent Sergt.-Cook (Spencer). He was called the 'Rissolle King'. Thousands of hot rissoles were sent up to the front line and were very popular. The Battalion cooks did wonders in this direction.'

greatly to the comfort of the troops. For another ten days the frost continued, the ground being frozen to a depth of from nine to twelve inches. Then on the 13th came a thaw with the consequent reversion to water and mud. On the 19th all ranks rubbed feet with grease—sure sign of a move up into the front line.

The Fusiliers marched to Rocquigny station on the 22nd and entrained for Trescault. They then marched via Beaucamp and relieved 'Drake' Battalion, 63rd Division, occupying support trenches in the La Vacquerie left sub-sector.

Since the thaw on the 13th the trenches had again become mud alleys and the conditions in the front-line and support trenches were horrible. A Company had taken over Rhondda Trench—a particularly nasty spot. It was in an exposed position and overlooked by the Bosche from Gonnellieu and the high ground east. No sooner did the enemy observe movement in this neighbourhood than he shelled the trench heavily. The C.O., therefore, was given permission to move A Company to cellars and billets in Villers Plouich. In this place a canteen was established, two company cooks were brought up, and, as there was a good supply of well water, hot food was soon available for every one.

By day, owing to the enemy having direct observation, the Battalion had to lie 'doggo', but at night carrying parties were busy moving up

large quantities of bombs, S.A.A. and Royal Engineer material for the battalions holding the front line.

It is at this period that certain indications appear in the diaries which give an unmistakable impression of preparations against a great attack: work on the defences was everywhere in vogue, old trenches were being improved, new ones dug, fresh defensive areas planned, quantities of wire put up, dumps formed—everything in fact which pointed to an expected attack on a large scale. And there were strong efforts on the part of the Bosche to fraternize—all of which were sternly discouraged.

The Fusiliers took over the front line on the 25th and at once began to improve the trenches; the establishment of posts, all of which had to be dug and duck-boarded, kept the men busy and little interruption took place from the Bosche. Even when relief came and the Fusiliers moved back to Metz working parties still put in many strenuous hours, day and night.

No one knew the day nor the hour when the enemy would attack, but that he *would* do so was an accepted thing. But where was the officer or man who was unduly perturbed?

On the 2nd of February the Fusiliers' sports were held at Metz—a very successful and enjoyable meeting. C Company won the marching competition, while D and B tied in the com-

petition between companies for 'the best dinner produced from the day's rations'.

The 3rd saw a change which no one appreciated: owing to the disbandment of certain units in the 2nd Division ¹ the three infantry brigades were reorganized and the 17th Royal Fusiliers found themselves transferred from the 5th to the 6th Brigade. It is true that they left the company of gallant battalions for that of other equally gallant units, but officers and men had made many friends in the 5th Brigade, and it was hard to leave those with whom they had often fought side by side.

The Fusiliers paraded that morning on the Sports Ground, and, after inspection by their Brigadier (Brig.-General Bullen-Smith), were addressed by him: 'He informed us that it was the last time he would address the 17th Royal Fusiliers as their Brigadier as the breaking up of certain units in the Army necessitated our transfer as a battalion to the 6th Brigade. He spoke of the very high esteem he felt for the Battalion, and expressed gratitude to all ranks for

¹ The supply of reinforcements from the United Kingdom had shrunk to such small numbers that in order to replace losses Sir Douglas Haig was forced to reduce the number of battalions in a brigade from four to three, disband many battalions and send their personnel to those divisions which badly needed reinforcements. Several divisions were reduced to cadre strength and taken out of the line altogether.

the way they had supported him while under his command. He was greatly moved at parting with the 17th Royal Fusiliers, and his good wishes and those of the 5th Infantry Brigade would always be with us.' General Pereira also briefly expressed his regrets which necessitated the change.

The new comrades of the 17th Royal Fusiliers were the 2nd South Staffords and the 1st King's—two regular battalions; these three formed the 6th Infantry Brigade (Brig.-General R. K. Walsh). On the 6th the Battalion passed under the command of their new Brigadier.¹ At 5 p.m. that night they relieved the 1st King's in the left of the La Vacquerie sector. But there is little of outstanding interest in the Battalion diary until on the 16th there is a copy of a letter sent to the C.O. by the G.O.C. Division:

'I am proud to see that Captain Stone, who was killed in the German attack of the 30th of November, 1917, when the 17th Battalion Royal Fusiliers fought so magnificently, has been awarded the Victoria Cross. I congratulate the Regiment on the great honour which has been bestowed upon it, an honour earned by a most particularly gallant action.'

On the 17th there are two entries worth recording: the first is the arrival of a draft of 30 other ranks—nearly all old 17th Royal Fusilier men—

¹ The diary of the 6th also contains mention of the award of the Belgian *Croix de Guerre* to No. 575 R.Q.M.S. (acting R.S.M.) T. Brunton.

and the second a report of heavy bombing by hostile aircraft and gas shelling by the Bosche artillery.

The bombing and gas shelling were significant, and if the records are carefully examined it will be found that from this time onwards until the great Bosche offensive opened on the 21st of March, our trenches and back areas were bombed and shelled systematically, for the very obvious purpose of putting as many men out of action as possible.

The gas used was 'mustard gas', insidious in action, best explained by the following extract from the Fusiliers' diary of the 20th of February: 'Six men out on working party, returning later, took their equipment to another billet but were affected by the gas through contact with their equipment and were evacuated to hospital the following day.' On the 25th no less than 3,000 of these shells were fired into Havrincourt Wood.

Air raids were almost nightly occurrences, particular attention being paid to all headquarters—company headquarters particularly. A Nissen hut, containing four officers, was completely blown away, one body being found thirty yards distant.

It was the gas shelling, however, which had such disastrous effects upon the strength of the Division, for it went on day after day, night after night, and terrible were the results. The follow-

ing extract, taken from General Pereira's diary, describes a scene all too familiar during that tense period:

'We met a party of 60th and R.A.M.C. coming down gassed. Those who were temporarily blinded, who were the large majority, were being led by those who could see. Some of the men were in considerable pain in their eyes and lungs, others being sick and throwing themselves on the ground when there was a halt and clasping their heads.'¹

As the end of February drew nearer the enemy's activity seemed to increase. His guns and trench mortars lashed the Divisional area with great fury; his aircraft bombed camps and dug-outs and billeting areas—there was no rest day and night. Yet all through, the men worked hard, even the battalions in the front line improving the trenches and wire and laying duck-boards while keeping an ever-watchful eye on the Bosche.

A deserter, captured on the 23rd, gave nothing away! In his opinion there would be no attack on that front! His captors were not impressed, for all the signs and portents pointed to an impending attack of great proportions.

On the 1st of March the Battalion diary records, 'Expected enemy attack', but nothing happened. The Fusiliers were then at Metz Camp. On the 2nd they went up to the support line in the Villers Plouich sector, relieving the King's Regiment.

¹ This incident was the original of the great picture 'Gassed' by John Sargent, now in the War Museum.

That night a storm of gas shells again swept over the Divisional area. For four hours the air was alive with shrieking shells, while over the ground the fumes spread in clouds; hundreds of casualties were suffered in the Division, the Fusiliers losing a number of men. On the 3rd, gas shelling was less frequent: one officer (Lieutenant H. S. Havelock) was wounded.

On the 3rd, however, another significant entry appears in the Battalion diary: 'much enemy movement', and for several days before the fateful day similar references to movement in and behind the enemy's lines occur, such as: 'enemy movement plentiful from north to south', 'large bodies of enemy seen entering Marcoing', 'movement again plentiful'.

Came orders to raid the enemy and obtain identifications, for the arrival of fresh German divisions was certain.

Previous to the raid the Battalion on the night of the 17th (being then still in the support line) sent out a fighting patrol under 2nd Lieutenant Panting to gain an identification if possible. The patrol entered Neptune and Anchor Saps but no Germans were to be seen, and the only thing captured was a notice-board which was brought back.

On the 18th the Fusiliers took over the La Vacquerie centre sector and began preparations for the raid.

The raiding party was led by 2nd Lieutenant Fish, who had 17 other ranks with him. The taping out was done by 2nd Lieutenant Panting. The raiders 'went over' and entered the enemy's front line opposite Anchor Sap. In fine style they entered the Bosche line. Second Lieutenant Fish jumped first into the trench and seized one German whom he retained at the point of his revolver. Lance-Corporal Bradley caught about six bunched in the communication trench and trying to get away. He dropped two bombs, one in front of them and one in the middle, both exploding. Several Germans were killed and shoulder-straps cut off the tunics of three dead men; 'no live Huns were taken owing to the keenness of our men in the raid, who actually shot a prisoner in their excitement'. Eight or ten Germans were killed. The Fusiliers had succeeded where so many other units had failed and congratulations were showered upon them from Divisional Headquarters and Headquarters of the 99th, 6th and 5th Brigades.¹

On the 20th of March the diary of the Fusiliers gives what is perhaps the most comprehensive picture of the enemy's final preparations so far as seen from the British lines:

¹ General Walsh in his report said: 'The men showed fine fighting spirit and were magnificently led by 2nd Lieutenant Fish, who displayed the greatest coolness throughout. He was the last to leave as he was the first to enter the enemy trench.'

'Enemy movement very abnormal. Several staff officers seen round La Vacquerie and a relief seemed certain. Several hundreds of enemy seen entering and leaving the trenches in full packs. Brigade warned. Signs of enemy offensive. Several enemy machine guns taken into their front and support lines.'

At last the question which every officer and man had for weeks been asking, was on the point of being answered.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREY AVALANCHE

MARCH, 1918

ALL over the great front which stretched from the right of the Fifth Army to the left of the Third Army, i.e. roughly from the Oise to the Scarpe River, east of Arras, the night of the 20th/21st of March was fraught with an ominous stillness. *It* was in the air—that nameless Something which all had been expecting. Weary eyes had watched for it dawn after dawn, and had seen the sun rise and go down without any attack materializing, other than here and there a raid or a ‘rough-and-tumble’ in No Man’s Land. But on this one night, in billet and in trench, a certain feeling was abroad that *at last* the hour was at hand. It is curious—that feeling, but all soldiers know it and very seldom are they mistaken.

The 17th Royal Fusiliers had been relieved after darkness had fallen by the Poplar and Stepney Rifles and the London Irish, for the 2nd Division was handing over to the 47th

(London) Division. With cheery wishes of 'Good Luck' to the incoming troops the Fusiliers had filed out of the trenches, and, having marched to Metz, entrained there for Rocquigny. At 6 a.m. on the 21st the last company and Battalion Headquarters arrived at the latter place.

But by 6 a.m. the enemy's preliminary bombardment was already over an hour old, for shortly before 5 a.m. the stillness of the morning air was suddenly rent by the roar of a thousand and more German guns all speaking in unison with a row which defied description, and left men dazed and almost speechless. Gas and high-explosive shells lashed and swept the forward and back areas, even road centres miles behind the front line were shelled by high velocity-guns.

This savage hail of shell continued for several hours, and then, shortly before 9 a.m., the enemy's batteries and trench mortars concentrated on the British trenches and particularly on certain tactical features, i.e. the high ground. His infantry advanced to the attack at 9.40 a.m. (German time).

Briefly the German scheme of attack was as follows: the Seventeenth Army on the right was to reach the line Croisilles-Bapaume-Peronne, the Second and Eighteenth Armies on the left were to sweep across the Somme south of Peronne and gain Amiens. The Seventeenth Army was first of all to attack the line Croisilles-Mœuvres, the Second and Eighteenth Armies between Vil-

lers Guislain and La Fere. Thus it will be seen that the Flesquieres Salient (on which so much work had been carried out by the 2nd and other Divisions) was to be 'pinched off' and not directly attacked on the first day of the German Offensive.

Fortune favoured the enemy, for when dawn broke on the 21st a dense mist covered the battlefield-to-be, blotting out S.O.S. signals sent up from the front-line trenches, and preventing the machine gunners from obtaining a field of view, while the British artillery could only fire on targets previously registered. Thus, served by the mist, the Germans, vastly outnumbering the gallant troops of the Fifth and Third British Armies, advanced to the attack.¹

The British defences consisted of three defensive systems, i.e. the Forward, Battle and Rear Zones. The latter only concern the 17th Royal Fusiliers, for in that zone lay the Green Line which, though most of it existed only on paper, ran (on the V. Corps front) from east of Equancourt-Ytres-Bertincourt, then turned westwards to about half-way between Lebucquiere and Fremicourt.

The defences in the Rear Zone were 'sketchy'

¹ The Seventeenth German Army consisted of twenty-eight divisions, the Second of twenty-two divisions and the Eighteenth of twenty-six divisions. Thirteen divisions held the front line on the 21st, twenty-eight formed the first wave, nineteen the second and sixteen the third waves: in all seventy-six divisions.

—all that was possible had been done to dig trenches and put out wire, but the Green Line was, at the best, a poor system on which to fight a defensive battle.

The 6th Brigade as a whole (17th Royal Fusiliers, 1st King's and 2nd South Staffords) was located in, and in the neighbourhood of Rocquigny, on the morning of the 21st of March;¹ the 99th Brigade was near Etricourt, while the 5th Brigade was in the Ytres-Lechelle area.

General Weston's private diary for March, 1918 records that the 17th Royal Fusiliers, having arrived at Rocquigny, were ordered to 'stand to' two minutes later (6.2 a.m.) and remained 'standing to' all day. The 2nd Division, being in Corps Reserve, was not called upon, but rested and reorganized; indeed the troops in the Flesquieres Salient were not seriously involved on the 21st, for (as already stated) the enemy's intentions were to 'pinch off' the Salient. For the moment, therefore, the V. Corps (with the exception of the extreme flank) was not seriously threatened, and held its ground all day.

Only vague reports and rumours reached the Fusiliers of what had happened and was happening

¹ Of the V. Corps the front line was held by the 47th Division on the right, 63rd Division in the centre, 17th Division on the left: the 2nd Division (right) and 19th Division (left) were in Corps Reserve, occupying the Rear Zone, when the Bosche Offensive began.

in the front line. The German guns and trench mortars, having lifted off the British trenches after the final bombardment, there appeared suddenly out of the mist in front of the latter a vast host of grey-clad figures, hurrying westwards, shoulder to shoulder, bearing down upon the shattered British defences like an avalanche; that the German first line as soon as it was visible from the British trenches seemed to hesitate, shiver and then collapse under our storm of rifle, machine-gun and Lewis-gun bullets, only to be succeeded immediately by other troops; that they came on wave after wave, in prodigious numbers, *were* in point of fact *still* coming on; and to these rumours were added stories of the great stand made by our fellows, of individual acts of prodigious bravery, or of positions being evacuated according to orders, but from no part of the battlefield came rumours or reports of a debacle or of a break-through, as planned by the enemy.

For the Fusiliers the 21st passed *not* without interest, but without contact with the enemy. Rocquigny was shelled by a high-velocity gun, and all around the German barrage and intermittent shell-fire lashed the old Somme battlefields with unprecedented fury. At night the skies were alive with aeroplanes and bombs fell frequently.

Almost before it was light on the 22nd the Battalion received orders to move to Tank Camp,

on the Bancourt Road, and marched off in the chilliness and cheerlessness of dawn, then spent the day until 5 p.m. 'standing to' in a field, at which hour a move was made to Mill Cross (on the Fremicourt-Lebucquiere Road), where the Fusiliers supported the 9th Cheshires of the 19th Division.

On the 22nd the troops holding the Flesquieres Salient had been withdrawn to Highland Ridge, thence westwards along the Hindenburg Line to Havrincourt and Hermies.

At 1 a.m. on the 23rd the Fusiliers moved to the Green Line, astride the Haplincourt-Lebucquiere Road, 'stood to' again at 2 a.m. owing to a threatened attack by the enemy, and Colonel Weston was placed in command of the sector held by the 6th Brigade as Outpost Commander of the Green Line which was only to be held as an outpost line.

Dawn broke on the 23rd with every sign of hard fighting to be done. Colonel Weston had reported that he had established his position in the Green Line, the 1st King's were holding the right, the 2nd South Staffords the left of the Brigade sector, and the 17th Royal Fusiliers were in reserve; on the right of the 6th Brigade touch had been gained with the 24th Royal Fusiliers, and on the left with the 9th Cheshires of the 19th Division. He had been round the line and was satisfied that everything was correct.

At 6.30 a.m. 6th Brigade Headquarters ordered Colonel Weston to consolidate his line as an attack was anticipated—easier said than done, for in reality apart from a little wire no line existed. It would have to be dug, ammunition and stores brought up and no tools were available. But somehow or other it *was* done: Pioneers and Sappers lent a hand, and with the men using their entrenching tools and ‘putting their backs’ into the work some sort of cover had been provided, when, at 10 a.m., the enemy’s guns opened fire and poured a storm of shell on to the Green Line. But gradually the shelling ceased, and by the afternoon the enemy’s artillery was fairly quiet. At 5 p.m. a heavy bombardment all round again broke out and continued until dusk, but so far as the 6th Brigade was concerned no attack had been made by the enemy who, though occupying Velu Wood in large numbers, made no further advance against the South Staffords, King’s or Fusiliers, though south of these three Battalions he was (during the night) reported in Bus.

The night of the 23rd of March (so far as the 2nd Division was concerned) may be termed the end of the first phase of the Bosche attack.¹

¹ The reader must bear in mind this story deals only with the operations of the 17th Royal Fusiliers and their brigade and division; fierce and furious fighting took place from the 21st to the 23rd on other parts of the huge battle front.

No words can adequately describe the night of the 23rd/24th of March. Agitated staff officers (more perturbed than the infantry in the front line) galloped wildly across country, vainly searching for troops for whom they had orders, but could not find. Roads and villages were packed with transport and units on the move; everywhere those who had been 'pushed off' the roads made their way back or forward (according to their orders) to the accompaniment of the rattle of machine-gun and rifle fire and shell-bursts; flames from burning stores, canteens and huts threw such a glare over the old Somme battlefields as to illumine the darkness and provide light by which all could see.

In Ytres the Bosche was looting the canteens and getting drunk in scores; from dumps in the neighbourhood (set alight by our men before they retired) loud explosions rent the air, farms, villages, encampments were aflame.

From Ytres the grey avalanche swept on westwards to Bus: shouting and singing wild songs, the German soldiery poured down the slopes into the village; Lechelle also had fallen.

Conjectures, rumours (for the most part false and here and there spread by enemy agents), for the most part of an alarming nature, added to the general bewilderment; but even under such dire conditions there was no panic and the feeling existed that the Bosche was being 'held', though

there were no delusions as to the serious character of this great attack.

At 1 a.m. the Fusiliers were still east and north-east of Haplincourt: C and D Companies (right and left respectively) in the front line, B (right) and A (left) in support with Battalion Headquarters, about half-way between (but in rear of) the latter Companies.

Dawn broke and the Battalion 'stood to', every one ready for the expected attack.

The position in the Green Line was anything but satisfactory, for Bertincourt (directly east of the Fusiliers) formed a dangerous salient. With Bus and Lechelle gone and Velu Wood in the possession of the enemy, this salient was open to attack on three sides and could not be held for long. Indeed at 8.15 a.m. V. Corps Headquarters ordered the evacuation of the salient and the formation of a new line pivoting on the Haplincourt-Bertincourt road and about two miles east of the former village, thence running due south to the Red Line east of Rocquigny. The evacuation was to begin at 9.15 a.m. At about 8.40 a.m. (no incident of importance having happened to the Battalion up to that hour) Colonel Weston saw the Highland Light Infantry (5th Brigade) on his right¹ moving to a new

¹ On Colonel Weston's right the northern face of the salient stretched from north-east of Bertincourt, thence back westwards to the Velu-Barastre road.

position, and warned the 1st King's and the machine gunners.

At 9 a.m. the enemy's barrage fell: it was heavy and accurate. Colonel Weston then informed Brigade Headquarters that an attack was expected. Already troops were on the move. The 5th Infantry Brigade in withdrawing lost touch with the right of the 6th, and a dangerous gap was formed which fortunately the Bosche did not penetrate. Gaps in the line were a constant source of danger: there had been a huge gap between the inner corps of the Fifth and Third Armies, which only desperate fighting and indomitable pluck had filled; there was then another between the V. and IV. Corps (Third Army), again closed with the utmost gallantry.

At 9.50 a.m. the German infantry attack developed on the left and the South Staffords appealed for a barrage. The left post of the King's next received a direct hit from a huge shell and 'went up'—the scene was ghastly. Two platoons of D Company of the 17th Fusiliers were then rushed up to fill the gap.

It was now obvious that the weight of the German attack was developing from the north-east, i.e. against the left flank of the 6th Brigade, and Captain Glasson (17th Royal Fusiliers) sent a report to Colonel Weston confirming this. A little later the 2nd Highland Light Infantry, on the right, were discovered moving too far back;

they were to be forgiven, for the Red Line also existed more on paper than in fact.

Next troops of the 19th Division (Cheshires), north of the 6th Brigade, were seen falling back, being hard pressed so that Captain Aylmer with A Company of the Fusiliers formed a defensive flank facing north, i.e. Delsaux Farm, the Company Commander placing himself under the orders of the O.C., South Staffords.

At 11.30 a.m. the S.O.S. went up on the right flank, and an hour later the O.C., 1st King's, reported that the gap on that flank had now been filled, the Highland Light Infantry having been ordered to stay where they were. At 1 p.m. came signals from the front line for reinforcements, and Colonel Weston sent up three platoons of C Company.

At 1.30 p.m. the enemy's fire became intense, bitter fighting was obviously at hand. To fill the gap on the right the O.C., 17th Royal Fusiliers, sent up two platoons of B Company who were to form a defensive flank, but the officer in charge—2nd Lieutenant Campbell—was killed on the way up and the two platoons did not reach their objective.

Just after 2 p.m. came the alarming news that the right flank had gone and that a general retirement had set in. On confirming this Colonel Weston arranged with the O.C., 1st King's, that the latter should go back with the Adjutant,

17th Royal Fusiliers, and that both the Fusiliers and King's should re-form about the Red Line. Captain Taylor was then ordered to hold the sunken road just east of Haplincourt to cover the retirement. It was about 2.45 p.m. when Colonel Weston with the rearguard reached the Red Line, north of Villers au Flos, and there found orders awaiting him to hold the Red Line if possible, and if not, rally at Beaulencourt.

In the Red Line things were confused: some of the 6th Brigade were forming up, others retiring. Some sort of order was evolved out of chaos, and at 4.15 p.m. the O.C., 17th Royal Fusiliers, reported to Brigade Headquarters that he was established with King's on the right, South Staffords in the centre and Fusiliers on the left; it had not been possible to establish touch on the flanks, and, what was even more unfortunate, ammunition was short.

The enemy was now coming on in great numbers, his aeroplanes swarming the skies and giving directions to the hostile guns with a precision which compelled admiration.

Two machine guns fortunately gave their assistance, and as the Bosche deployed from Haplincourt very heavy casualties were inflicted on him; but little recked he, for when one German fell there were a dozen to take his place, and the grey avalanche pressed on like the angry waves of a storm-tossed sea. Some excitement

was caused and jubilation when a Bosche aeroplane was brought down in flames.

A tank, waddling back after a counter-attack, was stopped by Colonel Weston and relieved of its Lewis-gun ammunition, but before it could be distributed the enemy pushed home his attack and the Red Line gave way. Another general retirement ensued, and finally, about 6 p.m., the Fusiliers, now diminished in numbers, rallied about Beaulencourt with the remainder of the 6th Brigade, but the latter, having received orders to occupy the Ligny Thillois Line with the 5th Brigade on the left, moved westwards again and occupied the position ordered by about 10 p.m. It was, however, near midnight before the Fusiliers were formed up on this line, then, just after 3 a.m., they were ordered to form up on the Albert-Bapaume road, i.e. west of Ligny Thillois. But even this was only a temporary position, for at 5 a.m. fresh orders arrived to retire to a line round Pys. This movement was carried out successfully.

It was 7.30 a.m. on the 25th when the 17th Royal Fusiliers formed up on a line north-west of the village of Pys. Already exhausted by four days of marching, counter-marching, fighting and digging, worn out almost for want of sleep and proper rest, their greatest trial was yet to come.

In numbers they were pitifully weak, for on

the previous night when they reached Ligny Thillo, and with the King's (1 officer and 16 other ranks) and South Staffords (2 officers and 21 other ranks) were formed up, their strength was A Company 26 other ranks, B Company 26 other ranks, C Company 1 officer and 18 other ranks and D Company 2 officers and 11 other ranks, and this little handful was destined to hold back the grey masses as they advanced westwards, to inflict hundreds of casualties on the enemy, before the end came.

The morning was gloriously sunny, for the ground mists had soon passed away. The first orders which reached the 17th Royal Fusiliers were timed 10.40 a.m. The 5th and 6th Brigades were to take up a position from Le Sars to west of Warlencourt-Eaucourt and cover the retirement of the 99th Brigade and 10th D.C.L.I. if driven out of their positions, i.e. from Ligny Thillo southwards. The 99th Brigade and D.C.L.I. were then to act in a similar manner, covering the withdrawal of the 5th and 6th Brigades; the general line of retirement was Miraumont-Auchonvillers. Of the 6th Brigade the 17th Royal Fusiliers were to be on the left astride the Warlencourt-Eaucourt-Pys road, King's in the centre and South Staffords on the left; the 5th Brigade to be on the right of the 6th.

The Fusiliers moved off at 12 noon and took up a position west of Le Sars.

The 2nd Division was now on familiar ground—Miraumont, Courcellette, Le Sars, Loupart Wood, were places well known just a year previously when, in high spirits, the Division followed up the retreating Bosche as he hurried back to the Hindenburg Line. It was a country of high ridges and deep gullies, of woods running over the slopes, with Loupart Wood looking down upon the valleys—sinister and menacing.

On one of these ridges west of Le Sars the Fusiliers took up position. By 1.30 p.m. the 99th Brigade and the 10th D.C.L.I. had passed through, and fresh orders had been received to retire to Auchonvillers. At this period C and D were the front-line Companies, while A and B were in support. C and D were, therefore, ordered to withdraw through A and B, this process of retirement being repeated until the Battalion fetched up at its destination.

C and D were duly marched off followed by A and B, personally commanded by Colonel Weston.

On the Pys-Miraumont road Colonel Weston (who had remained with the rearguard) halted the two companies, and, collecting what stragglers he could, began to reorganize. He had with him about 100 men and 2 officers. On his right about 100 men of the 24th Royal Fusiliers were marching away westwards.

The time was now about 2.10 p.m.

A brigadier-general (Brig.-General Pelham-Burn) rode up and asked for the senior officer. Addressing Colonel Weston he said: 'The Corps Commander's orders are that the Irles-Pys-Courcelette line is to be held at all costs. Officers are, if necessary, to use their revolvers to keep the men back. The 51st Division are on your left.'

Colonel Weston pointed out to the brigadier first that the whole of the 6th Brigade certainly (and to the best of his knowledge the whole of the 2nd Division) had gone back to Auchonvillers, and that he had insufficient men to hold such a stretch of line and very little ammunition. However, he said he would do all he could and try to get reinforcements. The brigadier then rode off.

The 51st Division *was* certainly on Colonel Weston's left, but so far north that they could only be seen through glasses; they were out of touch of course. One cyclist orderly remained, and the C.O. sent off a most urgent message to Brigade Headquarters stating his position and asking for reinforcements and ammunition. Simultaneously he sent an officer to fetch back the party of 24th Royal Fusiliers who had recently passed, going westwards.

On the top of a ridge which formed part of his position, and facing the left flank, Colonel Weston then strung out his little force—A and

B Companies. He placed B Company, under 2nd Lieutenant Panting, on the left, ordering that officer to try and obtain touch with the 51st Division. A Company, under Captain Aylmer, was on the right of B, and when the party of 24th Royal Fusiliers came up they were put in on the right of A. On the right flank no other troops could be seen for miles.

This little rearguard of officers and men then awaited the onslaught of an enemy vastly superior in numbers with guns and machine guns at his disposal. With the same undaunted courage with which Stone and Benzecry and their very gallant rearguard faced certain death in the Rat's Tail a few months previously, so now did these two companies of 17th Royal Fusiliers with their comrades of the 24th Battalion await the oncoming of the grey avalanche.

Soon after 2.30 p.m. the enemy concentrated his artillery fire on the ridge; his barrage was furious and merciless. His heavy machine guns enfiladed the line and his infantry advanced to the attack.

Tired and worn out as they were, the Fusiliers nevertheless shot well and coolly. Down went the leading Bosche, but others stepped into their places. For half-an-hour the enemy made no headway; any attempt to reach the top of the ridge was shot to pieces.

The Bosche then tried his favourite game of

outflanking, and, without supporting troops either on the left or right, without reinforcements of any kind, alone out there on the ridge almost surrounded by their enemies, those who held the flank of the little band of Fusiliers began to waver. But up on to the top of the ridge sprang the few officers who remained, and, rushing along the line, exposing themselves without fear, magnificently rallied the men—*and the line held.*

Through his glasses Colonel Weston could see the 51st Division, afar off, waver in just the same manner, but they too were being rallied.

Next the two officers on the left were wounded, but refused to withdraw. They 'carried on' after their wounds were attended to, and by their fearless example kept the men together until about 4 p.m. By that time casualties had become very heavy, though small to those inflicted on the enemy.

At about this time Major Pretty (acting second in command), who throughout that day of trial had borne himself with the highest gallantry, dashed up to say that the enemy had got round the right flank. Collecting all Headquarters personnel, Signallers and Pioneers, Colonel Weston hurried over with them and formed a defensive flank, keeping back the enemy and covering the Miraumont road.

The left flank then began to give way owing

(so 2nd Lieutenant Panting reported later) to the 51st Division having been driven back.

The end was approaching.

No reinforcements were in sight; ammunition was quite exhausted.

To do any more was physically impossible!

'I could not shoot the remnant of the men, now reduced to about forty, who had fought so well', said their C.O., and who could blame him?

At 4.30 p.m. Colonel Weston ordered the retirement. The indomitable Major Pretty, with about six men, stayed behind to cover their comrades as they fell back down the road leading to the bridge under the railway at Miraumont.

The gallant Major was killed and the remainder either killed or wounded, this information being given afterwards by the sole survivor—Sergeant Butterworth.

The officers maintained the highest traditions of the 2nd Division. The men fought most gallantly, but as was natural, in their exhausted condition and in a position completely isolated, they had to be rallied when they saw that there was a danger of being surrounded. All the lightly wounded were brought away.

Finally, in his report of this very gallant action, Colonel Weston said: 'The responsibility for all orders given on the ridge is undoubtedly mine. No blame can be attached to any officer

if it is considered that more could have been done.'

Regular troops could not have done more, for the difficulty of re-forming in the face of the enemy was very great. The loss of officers who repeatedly and fearlessly exposed themselves was severely felt. No less than 10 out of 15 had become casualties during this operation. Ammunition was a constant source of anxiety. The extremely exhausting series of moves at the beginning of the operations on the 21st, following immediately on the tour in the front-line trenches when many had been 'gassed' to a greater or a lesser degree, told heavily on the physical strength of all ranks.

Of the 8 wounded officers only one fell into the hands of the enemy.¹ This was largely due to the heroic conduct of Captain the Rev. H. Gibson. This gallant padre, a man of great physical strength, again and again picked up wounded officers and men and strode back with them across his shoulders all unmindful of machine-gun and rifle bullets.

The Battalion diary has the following entry—a last picture of that fateful day: 'Battalion file along main road and halt at Beaucourt; thousands of officers and men are gathered together here; we move to a spot between Auchonvillers and hold line just south of the Ancre near Hamel.

¹ 2nd Lieutenant Fish.

Artillery falling short on 63rd Division. Brigade informed.'

'Quiet evening.'

During the closing days of the great Bosche offensive on the Somme in March the 17th Royal Fusiliers saw no more desperate fighting, such as they had already gone through. The 26th was critical north of the Ancre; vast numbers of the enemy poured down the valley to the river but failed to break through. They were on this day thrown back and their offensive power absolutely broken, and from this date the attack fizzled out.¹

The Fusiliers were sniped at on the 26th and lost a few men. At 11 p.m. that night they were relieved and marched back to Mailly Maillet,

¹ The following note on 'Improvised Transport' during the operations has been contributed by Mr. B. B. Pidcock (late C.Q.M.S.):

'During the March, 1918, retirement the Battalion rations had been dumped one day at the appointed place. No ration parties appeared, which perhaps was not to be wondered at in those days when movements had to be guided by circumstances. Arthur Newman (C.Q.M.S. A Company) and I set out together therefore to endeavour to find our respective Companies, which we eventually did some distance from the Dump. No ration party was however available. Fortunately, we found a horse, and having festooned it and ourselves with ration bags, etc., had the satisfaction of delivering the goods intact but very behind time. We eventually found the Transport and Cookers miles from the place where we had set out from. This was indeed a time requiring a bump of locality.'

and on the 27th to Beaussart where companies reorganized and A and B Companies were eliminated. At one hour's notice they moved to Englebelmer; on the 29th they took over a line held by the 99th Brigade in Aveluy Wood, then the front line. On the 30th Captain Glasson was wounded. A Fusilier patrol that night shot a German officer and another man and obtained identifications. After which the Battalion was relieved and moved back to Hedauville in Brigade Reserve.

The total casualties for March were 2 officers¹ killed, 7 wounded, 1 wounded and missing = 10; in other ranks the losses were 22 killed, 158 wounded, 16 wounded and missing and 167 missing = 363.

The following is an extract from a letter written by General Pereira to Colonel Weston after the 'March Retreat' was over:

'I am glad that I gave you a lot of trouble and got that written report from you. I am sending on a typed copy to the V. Corps Commander. I must have seemed slow in taking in the many magnificent accounts of fighting that I have received

¹ Killed—Major Pretty and 2nd Lieutenant F. C. Campbell; Wounded—Major Lavarack, Captains Aylmer, Glasson and Taylor, Lieutenant S. D. Antill and 2nd Lieutenants Harvey, Panting; Wounded and Missing—2nd Lieutenant Fish.

Three officers were wounded before the retirement—Lieutenant H. S. Havelock, 2nd Lieutenants V. H. Green and A. S. Leather.

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from many units, but now with leisure to take in facts, I begin to fully realize the magnificent stand of the 17th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, in its true proportions. There cannot be many Regiments in the Army with such records as your Battalion has achieved.⁹

CHAPTER XV

THE PERIOD OF ACTIVE DEFENCE:

APRIL—AUGUST, 1918

BY the end of March the Great German Offensive on the Somme had definitely failed, for nowhere had there been a 'break-through' and Amiens was still in the hands of the Allies. Once again the indomitable pluck of the British soldier, fighting under every adverse circumstance, had robbed the enemy of victory. All the same it had been a 'close thing' and 'Jerry' had only been brought to a standstill by the loss of 120,000 officers and men, many guns and much war material which, in the future, would have to be made good. Large numbers of reinforcements arrived, most of whom were mere boys, quite untrained, and battalion commanders were faced with difficulties owing to the recent loss of experienced officers and N.C.O.'s. An enormous amount of work on the digging of new defences, occasioned by the enemy's advance, had also to be carried out, and this threw an additional strain upon C.O.'s, who were often at

their wits' end to know how to combine the necessary training with the constant furnishing of large working parties. To a certain extent the enemy was faced by the same difficulties.

The ration strength of the 17th Royal Fusiliers when they marched into Hedauville on the 31st of March was 12 officers and 463 other ranks. Some of these—the new-comers—were mere lads who looked quite unfit to pass through such an ordeal as the Battalion had recently undergone. Those who had survived that period of great strain and trial were tired and worn and badly needed a rest. Yet nowhere was there depression or despondency. Rather was there jubilation at having held up 'Jerry's' advance: of course all had tales to tell of the fierce fighting they had gone through, of constant deeds of daring and bravery which never found their way to Battalion, Brigade or Divisional Headquarters.

On the 1st of April the Battalion relieved the 10th D.C.L.I. at Engelbelmer, in Divisional Reserve. On the 4th the Naval Division took over the line from the 2nd Division and the latter moved to the Flers area. The Fusiliers moved to Halloy and on the 5th to Sibeville where, their diary records, they 'expect to remain for short rest and training'.

The first thing was to reorganize companies, and, when completed, Captain Matthews was in

command of A Company, Captain Hewitt, B Company, Captain Beauford, C Company, and Lieut. Forbes-Menzies, D Company.

Billets in Sibeville were not good and were overcrowded but, making the best of a bad job, the Fusiliers got on with their training. They drew sixteen Lewis guns, for only four had survived the March operations. Under a Lewis-gun instructor from General Headquarters Lewis-gun School, and a musketry instructor from the Third Army, coupled with field firing and bayonet practice daily, training proceeded apace until on the 11th (the 2nd Division having been transferred to the VI. Corps) the Battalion marched to Sus-St. Leger, and on the 12th to Barly. On the 13th the 5th and 99th Brigades moved into the line, taking over from the Guards. On the 14th the Fusiliers moved to Blaireville, relieving the 1st Welsh Guards.

The 16th of April found the Battalion back once more in the front line: they relieved the 1st King's in the Boisleux-St. Marc sector. The trenches were good and deep with plenty of wire out in front. In this sector the support and reserve trenches received most of the Bosche shells, the front line being hardly touched—a pleasant change. Snow and sleet set in on the 19th and to reach the front-line trenches by day became impossible. But the next day the Staffords took over the line and the Fusiliers marched

June, and Private Hix's team of 'blacks' won as usual, while Colonel Weston's horse was second in the Charger Competition.

The next day the Fusiliers were most successful in the Brigade Boxing Competition, winning the Middle-Weight, Welter-Weight and Light-Weight events. In this competition Americans from the 1st Battalion, 308th Regiment, fought against the Fusiliers. Two nights later the Battalion organized a concert in co-operation with the 308th American Regiment—an extremely enjoyable and successful entertainment.

Finally, on the 5th of June, the Battalion played the 1st King's at football and drew with them two all.

The 2nd Division was now due back into the line: on the 4th the C.O. and company commanders had reconnoitred the trenches, and on the 6th the Fusiliers paraded, entrained on the light railway and arrived at Monchy-au-Bois at 10.30 p.m.

Bad luck attended the 'taking over'. The Battalion was due to relieve the 2nd Grenadier Guards at Ayette. They had started off up the line when 'Jerry' opened with his infernal artillery, and before the relief was completed (2.30 a.m. on the 7th) 2nd Lieutenant G. H. Spicer and 9 men had been killed and 10 more wounded.

The trenches taken over were in excellent condition, the line running just in front of the village.

Dug-out accommodation was good, and with a plentiful water supply within a few yards of the front line the Fusiliers looked forward to a 'pleasant tour'.

Another blow fell on the Battalion on the 8th: Lieut.-Colonel S. V. P. Weston, having been promoted Brigadier-General, left the Fusiliers to take command of the 122nd Brigade, 41st Division. Everyone was pleased, of course, that the C.O. had got a Brigade, but there was very genuine regret when he left the Battalion.

Major W. C. Smith, 1st King's Royal Rifles, then assumed command.

Yet another loss occurred on the 15th of June: the Fusiliers' beloved Padre—Captain the Rev. Gibson—had been promoted to the rank of Major and appointed Senior Chaplain, 40th Division, and left to take up his new work.

'The Battalion much regrets the loss of this gallant priest, who joined the Battalion in May 1917,' records the diary of the Fusiliers.

April and May were almost bare of incidents of importance, yet, behind the lines, intense activity had prevailed, while in the front line harassing tactics kept the Bosche busy while causing him considerable loss. Sir Douglas Haig describes this period in the following terms: 'The policy governing the actions of the forces under my command was the maintenance of an active defence, whereby our line might be preserved

unbroken, while every opportunity was taken to rest and train our sorely-tried divisions.'

Well! the Fusiliers had had their period of rest and training out of the line: they were now destined to take part in that period of active defence which continued (so far as the 2nd Division was concerned) until August when, at last, the Allies fell upon the enemy and dealt him blow upon blow, which finally ended in his collapse.

In June, all up and down the huge front, raids began. They were big affairs, in some instances whole battalions. To keep a watchful eye upon the enemy's movements, identifications were constantly necessary. The Bosche also raided our lines. All three brigades of the 2nd Division were in the line and each had tried to capture a German, without success.

It then fell to the lot of the 17th Royal Fusiliers to raid the enemy, and the operation was planned for the night of the 28th.

As soon as the raid was announced there was no lack of volunteers: everyone was keen to get at 'Jerry'. Twenty men were selected, fourteen from B Company and the remainder from D Company. The O.C., Raid, was to be 2nd Lieutenant L. C. Norrington.

Zero was to be 10.55 p.m.

The guns were to put down an intense barrage for one minute, then form a box barrage round the

part to be raided: a Stokes mortar was to co-operate.

Ten minutes before zero the raiders crawled out through the wire and formed up ready to advance. The barrage was excellent and the raiders were into the Bosche trenches almost at once. But only eight Germans were seen and these were so far off that they were able to run away. The raiders chased them for a distance of three hundred yards, but could not catch them. The O.C., Raid, then sounded the withdrawal. Only one German pack and several newspapers were brought back. The raiders had no casualties.

Sheer bad luck again! The raid, however, had other good results. The young, untried blood in the Battalion had had an excellent object-lesson, and it proved that the spirit of the Fusiliers was as keen as ever.

The 30th of June found the Battalion in Divisional Reserve at Monchy.¹

Influenza had been busy during the month and a large number of men had to be evacuated: the scourge at this period was sweeping the whole of France and Flanders—friend and foe alike suffered from it.

¹ Casualties during the month (not already mentioned) were 2nd Lieutenants W. H. Winn and C. W. Atkinson and 9 other ranks wounded. On the last day of June also the Battalion diary records the award of the D.C.M. to Corporal A. Birch and of the M.S.M. to Sergeant T. E. Sayer.

In Monchy the Battalion, after a good 'clean up', began company training. The weather was extremely hot—almost a tropical heat—so that work was carried out as far as possible during the early morning hours.

From the records it is clear that a big attack by the enemy was expected, and on the 5th of July the C.O. and the Brigadier (Brigadier-General Willan), reconnoitring the Cojeul Valley, came under shell-fire: the Bosche was bombarding the S.O.S. lines with a 5.9-inch barrage:

'They put over a deuce of a lot of stuff and are certainly able to put down a pretty useful barrage. They covered both the slopes of the valley and the valley itself. It was very instructive, and we sat down and watched it from a shell-hole. We know now when it is necessary to move like the devil in case of trouble: it would not be pleasant moving through it.'

The general situation in France and Flanders at this period was one of intense interest. On the Somme in March, on the Lys in April, and on the Aisne in May, the enemy had attacked in great strength and had won ground, but everywhere had been finally held. In July, about Douai and Valenciennes and opposite the British front, many intact German divisions had been massed—an attack seemed imminent. The French were of the opinion that the enemy was on the point of launching another violent attack east and west of Rheims and had massed the necessary troops to meet the onslaught: this attack was made on

the 15th of July. On the 18th Marshal Foch launched his great counter-offensive, which was immediately successful.

The tide was now turning in favour of the Allies: half a million American troops were already in France, the British and French armies had been reinforced and trained and the great loss in war material replenished. The time was almost ripe for that great blow which was to bring the German tottering to his knees.

Meanwhile the British troops in all areas 'carried on', preparing not only for another great attack, if the enemy was able to launch it, but getting ready also (unknown to themselves be it understood) for the Allied counter-stroke.

All up and down the front line, in the support trenches and back areas, the utmost activity prevailed. Never had there been as many raids, nor of such proportions: fighting patrols went out nightly, everywhere testing the strength of the Bosche front lines: artillery and trench mortars kept the enemy's trenches under such a storm of shell and bombs that captured prisoners could only speak of it as 'hell'.

The Fusiliers relieved the South Staffords in support on the 4th, and in the front line at Ayette on the 8th.

'Just before we moved up to the front line,' said Colonel Smith, the C.O., 'four shells came over very near Battalion Headquarters. Some of them must have been gas shells, because in a very short time we all noticed it and began sneezing and

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had a kind of choking sensation: it did not last long. It was a horribly dark night and we fell about all over the place moving up. My torch of course refused to work and Felton had not got one. We got up to the Staffords' Headquarters at 10.20 p.m. B Company are on the right, D centre, C left, and B in support. A Company took a long time completing their relief because they came in for further gas shelling.'

But even yet many of the new lads had much to learn, for in the Battalion diary there is a statement that the wiring was not good, 'so few men having any experience in the handling of barbed wire'.

On the 12th the Fusiliers sent out a fighting patrol:

'We got word through that Evans (2nd Lieutenant J. J. Evans) of D Company and one of the men in his patrol had been wounded doing a fighting patrol. They fired at a Bosche in front of a post and killed him. They then tried to rush to secure the body, but got bombed from a post in rear and had to retire. It was very bad luck not getting hold of an identity.'

A quick relief that night saw the Battalion back in Monchy again. The days passed strenuously: more training, more digging, then on the 16th the Staffords were relieved in support. On the 17th the whole Battalion was engaged in wiring different localities and in working on new dug-outs. On the 18th Douchy was literally drenched with gas, 1,500 shells being fired by the Bosche.

Both Douchy and Ayette were swept by a violent barrage on the 20th, on which date also the Fusiliers again relieved the Staffords in the front line.

Came several days during which the roar of the guns was terrific—as the waves upon the seashore grow turbulent and angry when beating up for a storm soon to break. About one hundred Americans (all ranks) of the 2nd Battalion, 319th Regiment, were attached to the Fusiliers on the 23rd for forty-eight hours' instruction. An amusing incident is connected with the arrival of the Americans, for even trench warfare at times had its humour. The story is contained in the C.O.'s private diary. A heavy thunderstorm broke over the trenches on the morning of the 23rd, drowning everything and everybody, including Colonel Smith as he was going round the line.

'When I got back to Battalion Headquarters,' he said, 'I was just drenched to the skin and had to change everything that I had on. I had a good rub down with a towel and a strong whisky. For the remainder of the day I had to sit about in a pair of pants and a shirt waiting for my clothes to dry. . . . Towards evening it began to be doubtful whether I should not have to receive the Americans in a shirt and pants or properly dressed. The former costume did not seem exactly the ideal rig-out in which to receive guests.'

As everyone knows, the amount of kit taken into the trenches was very limited, but the C.O. does not state whether he was reduced to the extremities he feared. He does, however, give an interesting pen picture of the Americans:

'The men were a very fine-looking crowd, but their discipline seems very free and easy. . . . The relationship between

the officers and their batmen was most extraordinary: they had a way of coming into our dug-out and just sitting down to talk to their officers. 'This form of socialism will soon demoralize our servants.'

The King's relieved the Fusiliers on the 25th, the latter returning to Monchy. Followed, two days of rain and the flooding of bivouacs, next two days of practising the attack. Then on the 20th the Battalion took over the support area in the Purple Line from the South Staffords; on the 31st work under the Royal Engineers occupied most of the day.

First rain, then a gruelling heat—such were the weather conditions in early August. But fine or wet preparations went on all along the front. The amount of artillery ammunition used was prodigious—poor Jerry was having a most uncomfortable time. Raids continued, growing ever more frequent and more violent. On the 31st of July, for instance, 2,000 rounds from the Stokes mortars had been fired on the Bosche trenches in conjunction with a raid by the King's. Yet all the while the troops in the forward area were in ignorance of the true meaning of the increased activity. But what they *did* know—more of an intuitive feeling—was that they held the upper hand, and everywhere up and down the line there was a cheerful optimism which boded no good for the Bosche.

In support, on the 1st of August, the Fusiliers

were at work under R.E. supervision.¹ As already explained, strenuous work was going on in all sectors, but suddenly calamity fell upon the Army: an order from General Headquarters had gone forth that in future battalions were to be rationed to nine bottles of whisky a week. As about six bottles per day was the normal consumption, there were agonized cries of despair in some sectors at the hardness of hearts at G.H.Q.

As a matter of fact there was little hard drinking in France and Part II Orders rarely contained charges of drunkenness against officers or men: it was the same in all battalions and units in the field.

On the 4th the Fusiliers again relieved the South Staffords in the line in front of Ayette. The tour, which ended on the night of the 9th, was unproductive of any incident of outstanding interest, and yet mention should be made of the fighting patrols which went out, on each occasion under 2nd Lieutenant Panting. This young officer (he was barely twenty-one years of age) was very keen on patrol work, and what was equally important, his men were getting just as keen, for

¹ Colonel Smith in his diary has the following item: 'I wrote up the War Diary in the morning. Felton (Adjutant) hates the War Diary and so I have agreed to always write it up for him: it is a job that is worth taking a little trouble over for the future.' Would that other C.O.'s had also thought of the future!

many of them were new to the game and had to get over that eerie feeling one always had in walking about No Man's Land in the dark.

As already stated, the Fusiliers came out of the line on the night of the 9th, but by that date the Allies had struck the enemy a staggering blow.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ADVANCE TO VICTORY:

8TH AUGUST—11TH NOVEMBER, 1918

AMIENS! the name rang loud through France and Flanders, for on the 8th of August the Fourth Army, with the French, had fallen upon the enemy some ten miles east of the town and had taken from him 22,000 prisoners and over four hundred guns, as well as pushing twelve miles into a vital sector of his line.

'August 8th', said General Ludendorff, 'was the black day of the German Army in the history of this war.'

The effect of this victory upon both Allied and German troops was tremendous. The German soldiery had been told that their offensives would end the War, that the Allies were exhausted and Peace, the terms of which would be dictated by Germany, was in sight.

Then came, first Foch's counter-stroke on the 18th of July, followed by a second blow at Amiens, and 'Peace' (as seen by Germany) faded from the

horizon: the *Friedensturm* (Peace Battle) was as far off as ever: gloom and despair settled upon the German Armies in France and Flanders.

But for the Allies dawn was breaking, and there was not an officer or man who did not feel that at long last their patience, their long-suffering, their cruel agonies were coming to an end.

On the 2nd Division front it was not until the 14th of August that the effect on the enemy of the Battle of Amiens became evident. During the afternoon word came through that the Bosche was retiring opposite Serre (further south), and by 6 p.m. the 1st King's had already occupied the Bosche outpost line on the 6th Brigade front, and the 17th Royal Fusiliers (then in the Purple System, in support) were warned that they would probably be moving before long. On the 15th, Colonel Smith with all company commanders went through the preliminary orders for an advance: the Fusiliers were to occupy the present front line and the Americans were to push forward as near Courcelles as possible and keep in touch. But no move took place for several days.

On the 18th of August the Battalion relieved the Americans in the front line in front of Ayette, A Company on the right, D in the centre and C on the left with B Company in support.

At this period, it is very evident from the records that the utmost secrecy was being observed as to the next big attack, as the following

extract from the C.O.'s private diary on the 17th of August shows:

'There is every sign of an offensive starting on this front. The whole countryside is full of troops and new ammunition dumps are being formed everywhere. Crowds of new battery positions are being put in. I should imagine that the "show" is going to be north of us. It is being kept most wonderfully secret and the men have not tumbled to anything out of the ordinary taking place. One of our officers, who went into Doullens to see the dentist, told me that the country behind is just stiff with troops: the 3rd Division is just behind us. I told him not to tell anybody what he had seen. The Brigadier came in just before lunch for a chat and I told him about all the troops being close up and he pretended to be very surprised and would not be drawn at all. Of course he knew all about it.'

Even more interesting news came to hand on the 18th: behind the forward area 11 miles of ammunition wagons were coming up to the line: all over the place enormous dumps had suddenly sprung up: hundreds of tanks had been seen nosing their ungainly way forward: the roads were blocked with transport: numbers of guns were rumbling along the roads, while the artillery in the line kept up a steady fire to deaden the sound of all this movement. But 'zero' day was obviously close at hand, for it was impossible to keep such a vast concentration from the enemy for very long.

On the 20th the plan of attack was received at Battalion Headquarters. The IV. Corps, on

the right, and VI. Corps, on the left, were to attack, the first objective for the latter Corps being the Ablainzevelle-Moyenneville Ridge: the 2nd Division, on the right, and Guards Division, on the left, were the attacking Divisions of the VI. Corps; the 3rd Division was to go through the 2nd Division and capture the line of the Arras-Achiet-le-Grand Railway.

The 99th Brigade was detailed for the attack and the 17th Royal Fusiliers were to support the 3rd Division after the latter had passed through the 99th Brigade, if called upon to do so.

Zero hour was 4.55 a.m. on the 21st of August.

On the afternoon of the 20th the Bosche shelled the Purple front line heavily, evidently trying to knock out some of the Divisional guns: at night he started to plaster Ayette and Douchy, and the area around, with gas shells.

The 23rd Royal Fusiliers were due to relieve the 17th Battalion at 9 p.m.

In his dug-out after dinner, whilst waiting for his Battalion to be relieved, Colonel Smith had a look at the 'confidential' map which had been issued to him with the attack orders, and his conclusion was this:

'I think this will be the start of a very big battle.'

In the light of what happened subsequently at Forenville and during all the period of the

Advance to Victory in which the 17th Royal Fusiliers splendidly upheld, even enhanced, their fine fighting reputation, the thoughts of their C.O. as he sat there in his dug-out, turning over the pros and cons of the coming attack, are not uninteresting:

'From the Battalion's point of view there is no doubt that we shall be "for it" very soon. I wonder how they will come out. I have two damned fine company commanders in Gibson and Ashwell, both with experience. Panting is as keen as mustard, too young and will probably lose his head. B Company may do anything. The four company sergeant-majors are all good, proved men in action. The R.S.M. could not be bettered. Some of the junior officers are a bit shaky.

'On Battalion Headquarters, I am very well served. Felton has been Adjutant for six months and is never flustered; he is a bit war weary and I should never forgive myself if he got killed with a wife and four daughters. Spencer is a perfect Assistant Adjutant and Intelligence Officer and I shall use him in action a lot. Smith has improved the signals no end and is a keen youngster. Chancellor is a mere child, but seems keen and has seen a lot of the War. . . .

'The men are an unknown quantity.¹ A good many have never been in a show and others only know the March fiasco: they probably think the Bosche a damned sight finer fellow than he will prove to be. . . . The main trouble is that I foresee a lack of "guts" in our men: it is not entirely their fault. They would mostly have been rejected earlier in the War and some of them have been dragged out to this show. I think

¹ It must be pointed out that the C.O. was referring to the numerous young drafts which had come out from England only a few weeks previously, some of whom were so unsophisticated that the 'rum ration' made them quite drunk.

it will depend very largely on how we kick off; if a good beginning is made it may mean a huge success, but if not we shall lack driving force. . . . It is rather like taking the footer field with a very raw team, to play against somebody who has whacked you earlier in the season and whom half your team think are experts. The only advice to give such a team is to go like hell and no quarter, hustle them off the ball: and that is the advice I have written to all my company commanders.

'My word, how proud I shall be of them all if they knock hell into old Jerry!'

It was 1 a.m. on the 21st before the 23rd Royal Fusiliers began to 'roll up': they had been delayed on the road by the vast amount of traffic—all moving to or from the forward area. Moreover, they had reached Alette when the gas shells were falling in it, then had to don their gas helmets and find their way about in the beastly things. Not the best beginning.

As the 17th Royal Fusiliers moved back to their allotted positions—Stork Support—they passed numbers of Tanks lumbering past to the front line. It was then dark and a thick mist on, so that each tank had a couple of men in front with electric torches, guiding the monsters forward.

At 4.45 a.m. the barrage fell: the 'show' had begun. Hundreds of guns poured a storm of shell upon the unlucky Bosche, tanks, accompanied by infantry, rolled on over the enemy's positions. By 6.20 a.m. the guns had completed their barrage programme and there was silence.

For hours no news reached the Fusiliers of what was happening in the front line and nothing could be seen. Then a report was received that the 99th Brigade had captured their objectives with very small loss.

At 11 a.m. Captain Panting of D Company sent down a message asking for more officers to replace those who had been gassed: this was the first news the C.O. had had of his Battalion being gas shelled. Apparently most of the Bosche gas shells had been 'overs', but the wind had brought the fumes back again: the gas was also insidious in action. A salvo of gas shells had fallen right in the midst of A Company, whose casualties were severe. The very hot weather made the gas even more virulent. By nightfall both A and D Companies had moved right out of the affected area, but even so their casualties were 2nd Lieutenants Waters, James, Austen and Saunders and 88 other ranks. The two Companies were so weak that they were amalgamated. They were reorganized by Captain Ashwell: he had Lieutenant Norrington to command D Company's men, who just made a strong platoon.

'It is sickening losing men like this without doing the least good,' said the C.O.

The night of the 21st/22nd was peaceful and in the morning the 3rd Division was reported to have reached the line of the Arras-Albert rail-

way: in one or two places they had been driven out again, but were counter-attacking.

By midday gas casualties in the 17th Royal Fusiliers were on the increase: by 3 p.m. Captain Panting and 2nd Lieutenants Cule and Morris had also gone down and the number of men gassed had increased to 138—'which is damned cheerful,' records Colonel Smith.

At 6.30 p.m. word was received that the attack was being continued on the 23rd, and at about 8 p.m. a rough scheme of the attack arrived: the 3rd Division was to attack Gomicourt and, on the capture of that place, the 2nd Division was to go through and take Ervillers, Behagnies and Sapignies: the 6th Brigade, plus the 1st Royal Berkshires, to attack Ervillers. The attacking battalions were to be the South Staffords on the right, King's on the left: the Berkshires were to support the South Staffords and the 17th Royal Fusiliers the King's. Front-line battalions were to assemble on a ridge just east of an old aerodrome: supporting battalions on rising ground just west of the aerodrome.

ERVILLERS AND MORY

On the 23rd the Fusiliers were astir by 5 a.m., for orders were to be on assembly positions by 8 a.m. A sketchy breakfast (for everyone's nerves were 'tuned up') was followed by a move at 6.15 a.m. By 7.30 a.m. the Battalion was in

its jumping-off position. The C.O. then sent off an officer to find out from Brigade Headquarters if Gomiecourt had been taken and another to ask the King's what the latter wanted the Fusiliers' carrying parties to bring up on their first journey. Battalion Headquarters were to be established on the Arras-Albert railway and a flag hoisted for the guidance of runners and the wounded.

Presently numbers of the new whippet tanks passed through the Fusiliers at a great pace.

Orders arrived to move off at 10.15 a.m., keeping 500 yards behind the King's. By 10.55 a.m. the Fusiliers had reached the position west of the Arras-Albert railway without suffering casualties. The line of advance had been just north of Courcelles, which was being violently shelled by the enemy. In the distance, south-east towards Gomiecourt, large numbers of German prisoners could be seen marching westwards.

A Company of the Fusiliers, 'carrying' for the King's, picked up their loads just west of Courcelles and, on passing through part of that village, had casualties.

C and B Companies had got in touch with the King's, and by 11.40 a.m. were consolidating their position between the railway and Ervillers. From 2 p.m. Companies were busily engaged in carrying: C Company during the advance had captured five 77 mm. guns, just left of the King's attack.

One man had been killed during the day and 28 wounded.

The 6th Brigade had captured Ervillers and held the village on the eastern outskirts.

The night of the 23rd/24th was noisy—British and German guns were busy over the whole area. At 1.40 p.m. on the 24th the Brigadier appeared at 17th Royal Fusiliers' Headquarters and said he had a very difficult operation for the Battalion to perform. The 99th Brigade, plus the King's, were to attack Mory Copse and the village of Mory. The former was on a very high ridge and full of machine guns which had held up the advance on the 23rd: the Copse had to be taken. The Berkshires were to attack Mory Copse and the King's the village: the 1st King's Royal Rifles and 23rd Fusiliers were to support the attack. If the attack was successful the 17th Royal Fusiliers were to follow the King's to a point 500 yards west of Mory Village, then change direction and attack due south, getting in behind the Bosche occupying the village of Behagnies and holding up the advance of the 5th Brigade.

Zero was at 2.30 p.m., so without time to write out orders, the C.O. hurried off to see all company commanders at B Company's Headquarters. There he explained the plan of attack, impressing on them the necessity for keeping in close touch with the King's.

With C Company, who were attacking on the left, leading, followed by B in the centre and then A Company with Battalion Headquarters in rear, the Fusiliers moved off towards Ervillers. On reaching the Ervillers-Mory road it was discovered that the 99th Brigade had not moved off and the Battalion halted for half an hour. Touch was then obtained with the 1st Royal Berkshires. The latter notified the Fusiliers when they were moving off, and at 3.50 p.m. the 17th began to advance just north of Ervillers Village. At this time the enemy's guns were 'shelling like mad': Ervillers itself was being swept by a violent bombardment and Battalion Headquarters were, therefore, established north of the village. Under the impression that the King's had taken Mory (that Battalion having reported the capture of the village) the Fusiliers moved forward at 5.5 p.m. But Captain Gibson of C Company sent back a message that his Company was being badly enfiladed from Mory and from west of that village, and he was digging-in along the Ervillers-Mory road. Colonel Smith then went forward to the spur east of Ervillers and came under machine-gun fire from Mory: that place had obviously *not* been captured. He then met the Brigadier who ordered the Fusiliers to establish an outpost line astride the Mory road, which was done, B Company on the right, C in the centre and

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A Company in support in a sunken road in rear.

This outpost line was established by 8 p.m. From 10 p.m. the Fusiliers were very heavily shelled with a mixture of high-explosive and gas. The latter again took heavy toll of the Battalion. The C.O., going round the line, had a touch of it: 'I felt as if I were choking and then suddenly my legs began to give way under me. We struggled on as best we could. Gibson began to vomit violently. In the end we just managed to reach the Aid Post in a sunken road and there Gibson, our two runners and I collapsed in a heap.'

Before it was light on the 25th a battalion of the 62nd Division (the 5th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry) began to arrive to relieve the Fusiliers. Chaos reigned for some time, the incoming and outcoming troops being hopelessly mixed. But at last order was restored and by 4.25 a.m. the 17th Royal Fusiliers had handed over the line and were on their way back to the aerodrome east of Alette.

Two other ranks killed and 18 wounded were the day's casualties.

There was little protection in Alette and the Battalion therefore spent the 26th constructing shelters in the area just north of the Courcelles road.

Fighting was still going on in the forward area :

'Jerry' had indeed 'taken a knock' and by the morning of the 26th the whole line of the Fourth and Third Armies had been advanced from our junction with the French at Lihons northwards to east of Mercatel.

Once again we had begun to move across the old Somme battlefields and, under the continual pressure of our attacks, the enemy was beginning to show signs of disorganization and confusion.

The 62nd Division had captured Mory and the 2nd Division Saignies and Behagnies. Several thousand prisoners, many guns and great quantities of war material of every kind had been taken.

Until the 1st of September the Fusiliers remained at Alette, training. Before the end of August three small drafts of officers and men increased the Battalion's strength by 2 officers and 137 other ranks, and on the 31st the trench strength stood at 22 officers and 441 other ranks.

Casualties during the month were chiefly caused by gas: to the names of those officers already given as being gassed must be added that of 2nd Lieutenant J. J. Carson: in other ranks the losses were 4 killed and 228 wounded, most of the latter being 'gassed'.

The Battalion had captured during the month sixteen light machine guns, eighteen heavy machine guns, two trench mortars, six 77 mm. guns and two anti-tank rifles.

On the 1st of September the Fusiliers were

ordered to be prepared to move forward at any moment as the 2nd Division was in Corps Support.

The last day of August and the first of September had again witnessed further advances by the Allies, and by the morning of the 2nd of September the line of the Fourth and Third Armies ran along the western bank of the Somme at Licourt northwards to Peronne, thence to Sailly, Fremicourt and Bullecourt: we were already half-way towards the furthest point eastwards we had ever held during the long years of the War.

At 5.55 a.m. on the 2nd the Fusiliers moved to Behagnies and at 1.30 p.m. to a trench west of Vaulx-Vraucourt. Here they were ordered to relieve the 5th K.O.Y.L.I., east of Vaulx-Vraucourt, as the 2nd Division was going to attack on the morning of the 3rd.

All three Brigades were to take part, 6th in the centre, with the 5th and the 99th on the right and left respectively. The first objective was the high ground west and south-west of Morchies, and the final objective the high ground east of the same village. Of the 6th Brigade, the South Staffords were to attack on the right and the 17th Royal Fusiliers on the left: the King's were to be in reserve.

Late that night the Brigadier called at Battalion Headquarters and gave his final orders, but mentioned that a report had come in that the Bosche had retired from Morchies, in which event the

6th Brigade would push forward to east of Beaumetz.

MORCHIES AND BEAUMETZ

The Fusiliers moved off at 12.45 a.m. to relieve the 5th K.O.Y.L.I., the relief being completed at 3.30 a.m. Battalion Headquarters were established at Vaultx.

At zero hour—5.20 a.m.—conditions were perfect: the ground was dry, the weather cool and dawn was just breaking.

The barrage fell punctually on the hour of attack and the assaulting Battalions swept forward. The Fusiliers attacked with Captain Ashwell's Company (A) on the right, and Captain Sword's Company (B) on the left, while C Company, under 2nd Lieutenant Harris, was in reserve.

But the Bosche had fled. He had evacuated his positions and the advance continued until both Morchies and Beaumetz had been taken. East of the former village, and in the neighbourhood of the latter, a few high-explosive and gas shells fell, but there was no serious opposition.

At 8 a.m. Battalion Headquarters moved to just south of Maricourt Wood and company commanders were ordered to consolidate in depth on the road running north-east from Beaumetz. The Brigadier then ordered the advance to continue at 1 p.m., the 6th Brigade taking over the

whole of the Divisional front, South Staffords on the right, 17th Royal Fusiliers on the left, King's in reserve. The objective first given was the high ground east of Demicourt, but it was afterwards altered to a curved line running from Boursies to the high ground immediately east of Demicourt: there, to be in touch with the Guards on the left.

The Battalion at this time was under the command of Major Fitzwarren-Smith, who had assumed temporary command on the 1st as Lieut.-Colonel Smith was unwell. The latter officer, however, remained in rear with the Transport.

DOIGNIES AND DEMICOURT

Orders were issued at 12 noon and Major Smith and the Brigadier rode out to all company commanders and gave them final instructions. The Battalion could not at first be found, but was eventually discovered in the sunken road south-west of Beaumetz.

Companies were then formed up and the advance began at 2.30 p.m. At 2 p.m. Major Smith had been hit on the hip by the nose-cap of a shell, and was badly bruised, but carried on.

With very little opposition Doignies was taken, but on the ridge east of the village oblique and enfilade machine-gun fire from the neighbourhood of Boursies held up the advance. B Company,

which had sustained casualties, then called for two platoons from the reserve company.

Battalion Headquarters were now established in a trench east of Doignies: the Fusiliers were now passing across the old defensive areas of March and were nearing the Canal du Nord.

At 5.30 p.m. the guns opened fire on the enemy's machine-gun positions, and at 6.30 p.m. the advance was continued on Demicourt. The village was taken, but by now the enemy's artillery fire was severe, for the Bosche was apparently established on his next defensive line, to which we were drawing nearer. All objectives were, however, captured by 6.55 p.m. and companies reorganized and consolidated along Sturgeon Support, Grayling Trench, Trout Post and the Demicourt-Hermies road to just south of the Sugar Factory. Posts were pushed out 300 yards in front and the remaining two platoons of the reserve company occupied Juniper Trench, astride the Doignies-Demicourt road. Touch on the right with the South Staffords was maintained, but not with the Guards on the left, and it was not until B Company of the Fusiliers, pushing north, had also captured Boursies, that touch with the Guards was obtained.

At 8.30 p.m. that night Lieut.-Colonel Smith returned and took over command of the Battalion. His description of what was going on behind the front line is interesting:

'All round Morchies there were a good many Bosche dead lying about and the road was stiff with dead horses: our guns had evidently caught the Bosche trying to get their guns away. The Bosche are evidently very rattled indeed to-day as we have seen so few British dead. . . . We are now in full view of Bourlon Wood again, and it was an extraordinary sensation being overlooked by that damned Wood once more: it seemed to be practically on top of us . . . it is no wonder the old Bosche was so determined to hang on to it last year.'

The night of the 3rd/4th was very disturbed, for the Bosche was shelling heavily, but the Battalion was very tired and, barring 'direct hits', all who could do so slept serenely.

The Transport had again 'played up' wonderfully: ration limbers and pack ponies had brought up food and supplies, and Lieutenant Grey, the Quartermaster, and the Transport Officers were, as usual, indefatigable in their efforts. Good quartermasters and transport officers were worth their weight in gold, and in this respect the 17th Royal Fusiliers were extraordinarily lucky.

At about 4 a.m. on the 4th the Bosche artillery began to shell the line heavily. Two hours later two companies of the 1st King's passed through the Battalion with the object of pushing forward as far as the Canal du Nord, but they were held up some 500 yards in front of the Fusiliers' outpost line by machine-gun fire: the Bosche evidently intended clinging to the line of the Canal as long as possible.

Just after midday word was received that the

Fusiliers were to be relieved by the King's Royal Rifles and move back to Beaumetz. The relief was completed by 2.30 a.m. on the 5th and the Battalion moved back. Casualties from the 2nd to the 4th had been 2nd Lieutenant W. F. Hughes (3rd) and 2nd Lieutenant J. Brownlee wounded: 8 other ranks killed, 42 wounded.

On the 6th, Beaumetz was so heavily shelled that the Battalion had to move to a fresh position north of the Bapaume-Cambrai road and in the neighbourhood of Chaufours Wood. Again on the 7th the enemy's shell-fire was very heavy and orders were received to move to an area between Morchies and Beugny.

From the 8th to the 13th the Fusiliers carried on with the usual training.

In writing in his diary on the fighting between the 31st of August and the 8th of September, Lieut.-Colonel Smith said: 'The men were better than any of us anticipated: they stuck things out very well indeed and lasted in a wonderful way.'

The new drafts were earning golden opinions for themselves!

At 4 a.m. on the 13th orders were received that the 6th Brigade was to relieve the 5th Brigade that night. The Fusiliers were to be in reserve near Hermies, while the King's took over the right and the South Staffords the left of the Brigade front.

This relief took place, but there is little to record for the next few days, for on the 16th/17th

the 2nd Division was relieved and the Fusiliers marched back to Bee Wood, Behagnies. In this area the Battalion stayed until the 26th of September.

By this date the enemy had been driven back upon his last defensive system—the Hindenburg Line: we were now almost within sight of country which we had not trodden since the painful days of August, 1914.

On the 27th the Third and First Armies and the Canadian Corps were to attack in the direction of Cambrai, on a front of about 13 miles from Gouzeaucourt to the neighbourhood of Sauchy Lestree: on the 29th the main attack was to be launched by the Fourth Army, having on its right the First French Army and on the left the Third Army: this attack was to be on a front of 12 miles between Holnon and Vendhuile.

The VI. Corps was to attack with the 3rd Division on the right and the Guards Division on the left: the 62nd was then to pass through the 3rd and the 2nd Division through the Guards. The 6th Brigade was to lead the attack of the 2nd Division with the 99th in support and the 5th in reserve. The South Staffords were to be on the right and the 1st King's on the left. 'Our Battalion', said Lieut.-Colonel Smith, 'will have to be in support again as we are so weak, and two companies will support the King's and two the Staffords.'

At 5 p.m. the Battalion moved off from Behagnies for trenches east of Doignies. The hundred all ranks nucleus and the Band had been sent off to Pommier: the Transport had moved to between Beaumetz and La Bucquiere. Major Smith, the Adjutant, and B and C Company Commanders, with the Orderly Room, remained at Behagnies.

The approach march to Doignies was difficult, for the roads and tracks were blocked with traffic, but eventually at 9.45 p.m. the Battalion reached its assembly area. Everyone was dead tired, but the cookers had arrived and every man had a big hot meal, thanks to the energies of the Battalion cooks.

During the night zero was announced as 5.20 a.m. on the 27th, the 6th Brigade to move at 'plus one hour'.

Our barrage opened up to time: it was terrific. For two days the Bosche ration parties had been unable to get near their front-line troops, so heavy was our shell-fire.

In the smoke and dust nothing could be seen: the Bosche reply was, so far, feeble. The men had a good hot breakfast: 'They all seemed very cheerful and are expecting to get a good supply of souvenirs.'

Companies were commanded by Lieutenant J. McD. Bradley (A), Captain J. G. Sword (B), 2nd Lieutenant T. H. Bennett (C) and Captain H. A. Panting (D).

Orders to move came at 6.45 a.m. The Staffords moved first, followed by the Fusiliers, the King's being late in starting. The Battalion passed through Demicourt and then took a cross-country track towards Lock 7 of the Canal du Nord. Then trouble began. The way led across old trench systems of 1917 and early 1918: barbed wire, trenches, blown-up tracks and roads—all impeded the advance, and the Bosche shell-fire was becoming very heavy. Pack pony leaders 'were having hell's own time with the troublesome beasts'. Some were jibbing, others kicked like mad, trying to throw their loads.

Near Lock 7 the shelling was terrific: then a block occurred as a Guards Battalion was just crossing over. With things most unpleasant, Colonel Smith shouted to the men to run for the Canal bed. Company commanders were then ordered to get their men up on the far bank of the Canal and make them lie down. Some reached the eastern bank, others did not. A host of low-flying German aeroplanes appeared, firing machine-guns and dropping bombs, one of which unfortunately had two direct hits on C Company, killing 2nd Lieutenant W. F. Williams and three other ranks and badly wounding 2nd Lieutenant F. W. Beckwith. At 11.30 a.m. orders came to move and by midday the Battalion was located in some old trenches north-west of Flesquieres. Ahead the Guards were attacking the enemy, who

could be seen bolting out of Orival Wood with our 18-pounder shell bursting among them.

ORIVAL WOOD AND NINE WOOD

Orders came along for the 6th Brigade to pass through the Guards Division and attack Orival Wood and Nine Wood, Staffords on the right, King's on the left, Fusiliers in close support. Of the latter, C and D Companies were to support the Staffords and A and B the King's. Zero was at 5 p.m.

The Staffords were in position west of a beet-root factory, east of Flesquieres: the King's with B Company (Captain Sword), 17th Royal Fusiliers, just behind them, all lying down in front of Orival Wood. The barrage started up to time. The King's went off in fine style and were soon through Orival Wood and on both flanks as well, followed by B Company, with A Company (Lieutenant Bradley) about 400 yards in rear. On passing Orival Wood, however, the attack came under heavy fire from Graincourt and Bourlon Wood, and at about 7.30 p.m. the attack was held up, the 6th Brigade line running roughly north and south, about half-way between Orival and Nine Woods. As the King's had no one on their left, C and D Companies of the Fusiliers formed a defensive flank. Up to 9 p.m. the whole of the 6th Brigade area was shelled heavily.

NOYELLES: THE CANALS DE L'ESCAUT AND
ST. QUENTIN

At 2 a.m. (28th September) orders were received to attack again at 5.15 a.m., 99th Brigade on the right, 6th on the left. Objectives were Lathe Trench, Cantaing Trench, Cantaing Support, Nine Wood, Noyelles, crossing over the St. Quentin Canal and the high ground east of the latter. Again the 6th Brigade would attack with the South Staffords on the right, King's on the left, Fusiliers in support.

The attack started up to time, but there was very little resistance and by 8.30 a.m. Noyelles had been captured and the river Escaut crossed. The crossings over the St. Quentin Canal were, however, strongly defended: stiff fighting was ahead. A and B Companies were lying under the shelter of a bank up against the Canal de L'Escaut, C and D in good dug-outs and shelters leading down into Noyelles.

The Division was now held up, the enemy having established himself east of the St. Quentin Canal, the crossings over which were, for the time being, death-traps.

At 11 a.m. the Brigadier called in at Battalion Headquarters, 17th Royal Fusiliers, and said the attack must be continued, but he thought the only way to get across the Canal was by raft.

He then gave Lieut.-Colonel Smith instructions to attack Marcoing and the high ground beyond at dusk.

'What I proposed to do,' said the C.O., 'was to get somebody to swim the river with a rope, attach the rope to something substantial on the far bank, and then get a raft made and float the men down the river on the raft, get them under the arches of the Canal and land them on the far bank where they would be able to remain in dead ground until the attack was due to start.'

Just north of Noyelles the river Escaut ran beneath the Canal, the latter being carried across the former by means of an aqueduct.

2nd Lieutenant F. G. Waters and a corporal of D Company then reconnoitred the river and the former volunteered to swim across and attach the rope on the far side. This gallant officer carried out his task and returned: the Sappers in the meanwhile constructed the raft.

Zero was at 7 p.m. D Company only was to cross first until Captain Panting fired a 'success rocket' which meant he had captured the Bosche front-line trench; then B was to cross and go into support on the left. C was to follow B and take up support positions on the right and be prepared to form a defensive flank facing south: A Company was to remain on the western bank and cover the Canal crossings.

D Company began to cross at 5.15 p.m., but the raft was not a success owing to the low clearance under the Canal arches. Some men of the Company then tried rushing across the bridge, but the Bosche opened with machine-gun and 5.9-inch fire and the company commander prevented other men from trying.

Things were not looking at all well for the Fusiliers, for Stokes mortar ammunition and bombs, urgently required for the attack, had not arrived, no artillery support was possible and no smoke screen. On both flanks the situation was obscure.

In darkness the attack was launched and at 8.30 p.m. the C.O. received a message saying that the first Bosche trench had been captured with two machine guns: but the bombers were short of Mills grenades and the second line could not be taken. At that moment a supply of bombs arrived from Brigade Headquarters and, collecting a large carrying party from men at Battalion Headquarters, the C.O. sent them all, fully loaded up, under 2nd Lieutenant Chancellor.

Another message arrived to say the Bosche had put down a heavy 5.9-inch barrage on the Canal crossing, one shell had hit the raft and had blown it to bits. Jerry's machine guns were also sweeping the whole area. The C.O. then collected all the servants and, placing them

under Major Smith, sent them off with S.A.A. for the front line.

All through the night of the 28th/29th the attack went on, the Fusiliers putting up a fine fight against extremely heavy fire and difficult conditions.

At 3 a.m. the Bosche counter-attacked and drove a battalion of the 57th Division (on the left) back on to the Fusiliers. Confusion ensued, during which some men of the latter fell back to the western side of the Canal. But Captain Spencer, Captain Sword and Captain Panting restored the situation.

The machine-gun fire was now 'hellish', but the G.O.C.'s orders were that a certain number of men must at all costs remain east of the Canal as the 99th Brigade was attacking at 5 a.m. At 6.30 a.m. nothing had been seen of that Brigade, but still it was impossible for the Fusiliers to advance.

At about 10 a.m. a report came in that the Bosche was retiring, but his guns still swept the Canal area. The Fusiliers were then ordered to push on to the line Paris Copse-Range Wood. They not only reached this line but pushed on too far ahead: the C.O. and Captain Spencer then went forward to bring companies back and reorganize in depth. While moving forward with the C.O. Captain Spencer was hit by a machine-gun bullet.

Back in their correct position between the Copse and the Wood the Fusiliers consolidated their line, C Company forming a defensive flank on the right. Three hours later the Berkshires came up.

At 6 p.m. the Bosche was reported massing east of Range Wood, but by this time our guns were in position and broke up the concentration.

At 9 p.m. orders arrived that the 17th Royal Fusiliers were to be relieved by the Berkshires forthwith. At 11.45 p.m. the relief was completed and the Battalion concentrated at the junction of the Canal and the River.

For the time being there was a lull in the operations and the Fusiliers set to work to make themselves as comfortable as the circumstances permitted.

Casualties had been heavy, the month's total being: 2nd Lieutenant W. F. Hughes died of wounds on the 7th September; Lieutenant J. McD. Bradley died of wounds 30th September; 2nd Lieutenant F. W. Beckwith was wounded on the 27th and Captains H. A. Panting and J. Spencer, 2nd Lieutenants H. D. Etheridge, F. G. Waters, J. S. McMenamin, O. L. Bridges and T. C. Lawrence were wounded on the 29th. In other ranks the losses were 36 killed, 190 wounded and 12 missing.

Captain H. A. Panting, M.C., who had led D Company in the first rush over the lock and

in the taking of the trench beyond, showed remarkable steadiness and bravery under several counter-attacks which the enemy made during the night.

He was first hit in the left arm and later in the knee, but absolutely refused to consider the request of another officer that he should go down. At about 3 a.m., however, while standing to direct some of those who had been temporarily forced out of the trench, he was hit through the chest and fell unconscious.

Fortunately he came under the care of 'The Doc' (Captain J. H. Moir), who had, by a very fine effort, established himself across the lock within a very few yards of the enemy. Later in the morning Captain Panting was carried across the Canal to safety by some of his own men.

The trench strength was now down to 15 officers and 311 other ranks.

FORENVILLE

The Hindenburg Line was broken, 36,000 more prisoners and 380 guns had been captured and the enemy's *morale* had suffered a further terrific blow.

On the 8th of October another great battle opened—Cambrai, 1918—the prelude to the final German debacle and surrender.

News reached the Fusiliers of the impending

battle on the 7th¹: from St. Quentin to south of Cambrai the Fourth and Third Armies were attacking on a front of over 17 miles. Of the VI. Corps the 3rd Division would be on the right, the 2nd on the left.

Only the 99th Brigade was attacking in the 2nd Division and the Fusiliers, as soon as the battle began, were to move to the neighbourhood of the Canal du Nord for rest and preparation for the next 'show'.

At 4.30 a.m. on the 8th a terrific barrage was put down on the Bosche positions, but his reply was much heavier than it had been for some time: their 'heavies' were especially active.

The Fusiliers were getting ready to move back when, at 8.45 a.m., the Brigadier wanted to see the C.O. To the surprise of the latter, he was told that his battalion had been placed at the disposal of the 99th Brigade, which, having attacked, had captured the first and second objectives, but had been driven out of the latter again in a violent counter-attack. The 3rd Division had failed to take Seranvillers and the 63rd Division Niergnies.

Colonel Smith was then told to report for orders to 99th Brigade Headquarters at Mont sur l'Oeuvre. The G.O.C. of that Brigade

¹ The Battalion diary for the 6th of October contains mention of the award of the Military Cross to 2nd Lieutenant Vaisey and the D.C.M. to C.S.M. Atkins.

ordered two companies to take up a position on the L'Epine-Rumilly road: B and D were detailed: A and C were ordered to be ready to move at ten minutes' notice.

At 1 p.m. the 3rd Division again attacked Seranvillers and failed: at 3 p.m. the 99th Brigade attacked Forenville and the Forenville-Cambrai road, which attack also failed: the enemy's machine-gun fire from Niergnies and Seranvillers had broken up the attack.

Another attack on Forenville was ordered for 6 p.m., the company commanders being ordered to capture that place 'at all costs', as it was holding up the whole of the attack. At 4 p.m., hearing that the 3 p.m. attack had failed, the Brigadier of the 99th Brigade ordered the 17th Royal Fusiliers to carry out the next attack.

It was grossly unfair to put the Battalion into the battle again, for the men were tired and worn out after six days in the line and the heavy fighting they had passed through.

"The General was in a very impatient state. I asked him what he wanted me to do if we found that we were meeting with very great opposition, and he wanted to know what I meant. So I said, "Well, do you want me to go on whatever the cost?" He said, "My orders are that your Battalion is to take Forenville at all costs!" I then knew what to do.

'I got hold of my Company Commanders and told them that we would attack with B Company on the right, D on the left, A in close support and C in reserve. That they were to take the whole village and dig in a couple of hundred yards

beyond the village and throw back their flanks on either side of the village as far as the main road and dig in there. We had only five minutes in which to discuss the attack and then I wished them all the best of luck and off they went. . . . If the men could only get into position in time for the barrage, and provided that the 3rd Division went all out for their objective, on the right, we might succeed. The whole trouble was getting the Battalion lined up square to their objective before the barrage opened. The barrage opened at exactly 6 p.m. and it seemed a very good one. . . . I was in a perfect fever of excitement to know what had happened to the Battalion. . . . At about 7.45 p.m. one of C Company's runners came in with a message from Gibson, timed 6.57, saying that the village had been taken, but that the attacking companies were too weak to hold the position. Ashwell had gone up with the whole of A Company to reinforce the line and Gibson had moved his company up into close support. They had not been able to establish touch on either flank, but were sending out patrols to try and gain touch and that they wanted reinforcements.'

On ringing up the G.O.C., 99th Brigade, and reporting the situation, the Brigadier was dubious about the success of the Fusiliers and had to be reassured.

'Hewitt (Adjutant) arrived back from the line: he had not been into Forenville but had met some of our wounded who confirmed the taking of that place. He said that we had only just got up to the jumping-off position in time and that three of the companies were still in fours when the barrage opened: they then wheeled round to get square with the objective, then extended at once and doubled forward to keep up with the barrage which had gone forward by this time. The last he saw before it got too dark was our men walking along behind the barrage within a couple of hundred yards of the Cambrai road.'

The next report at 9.30 p.m. stated that the Fusiliers were well on the eastern side of the village: that there were still Bosche hiding in the cellars and bombs were urgently required to clear them out. The report also stated that 'the men were in very good form and were very pleased with themselves over the attack'.

It was indeed a fine performance: the Battalion had succeeded where all others had failed.

The Guards attacked through the Battalion at 5.20 a.m. on the 9th and the Fusiliers made their way back to Nine Wood: the whole of the 2nd Division was being withdrawn from the line for a rest.

On the 12th, Colonel Smith received the following letters, one from Brigadier-General A. E. Macnamara, G.O.C., 99th Brigade, and the other from the Fusiliers' own Brigadier, General F. G. Willan, G.O.C., 6th Brigade:

'DEAR WILLAN,—

'A line to tell you how much I and all the 99th Brigade appreciate the help the 17th Royal Fusiliers gave us in our fight on October 8th, and the fine work the Battalion did in the capture of Forenville under circumstances of extreme difficulty. The 17th Royal Fusiliers were put in to capture Forenville late in the evening and at very short notice, and there was barely time for the C.O. to get his Battalion on the jumping-off line before zero.

'Notwithstanding these difficulties the Battalion carried out its task exactly as ordered, captured Forenville (which had been holding us up all day), the capture of which was considered by the Corps Commander as vital to the operations

projected for October the 9th. I should be grateful to you if you would express to the 17th Royal Fusiliers the thanks of the 99th Brigade for enabling us to finish off our task of capturing the Green Line, and my own pride at having them under my orders for the operation.'

General Willan said:

'It gives me great pleasure to be able to forward the above report of General Macnamara. Your Battalion has recently been called upon to carry out two urgent operations. The first when it was ordered to cross the Canal St. Quentin under most adverse circumstances, the second when it was ordered to capture Forenville. Both these operations were most successfully carried out. The latter performance is all the more remarkable considering the weak state of the Battalion and the long spell it had been in the trenches, and it speaks very highly for the efficiency and *morale* of all ranks.'

General Pereira, G.O.C., 2nd Division, also told Colonel Smith that the Fusiliers had put up a magnificent fight and he considered it was perfectly marvellous how they had crossed the Canal on the 28th.

About 60 Bosche were captured by the Battalion, whose losses were comparatively light, i.e. 3 officers (2nd Lieutenants A. A. Gault,¹ J. L. White and A. G. Powell) wounded, 3 men killed and 21 wounded.

This battle proved to be the last major operation in which the 17th Royal Fusiliers were engaged. It was very fitting, therefore, that the last 'show' should end so splendidly.

¹ Died of wounds 10/10/18.

The Bosche was now retiring in disorder before the victorious Allies. He endeavoured to hold us up on the Selle but was soon beaten and forced to abandon all his positions.

On the 27th Lieut.-Colonel Smith went home to England on leave and Major S. J. M. Hole assumed temporary command until the 3rd of November, when Major J. J. Powell, 52nd Light Infantry, assumed command.

The October diary contains the following summary of casualties for the month (exclusive of those names already mentioned): 2nd Lieutenant H. D. Etheridge died of wounds 2/10/18; 18 other ranks killed, 44 wounded.

Honours and awards: Military Cross—Captain H. F. Ashwell, 2nd Lieutenant H. D. Etheridge; Military Medal—Lance-Corporal A. E. Cottuck (bar), C.S.M. W. J. Kerry, C.S.M. C. Blissett, Private J. McLevy, Private F. H. J. Garner, Lance-Corporal H. E. Harvey, Lance-Corporal T. Laidlaw.

One last 'stunt' the Fusiliers carried out on the night of the 31st October/1st November—a raid on La Folie Farm, near Ruesnes.

'When the Battalion was in the line in the Escarmin sector 1st November, 1918, I had duly handed over D Company rations and was on the point of returning to the transport lines at Escarmin, when I received a message to call at Battalion Headquarters. On arrival there I found that I was to escort and hand over to the French Authorities at Escarmin a draught

ox which had been found wandering near the front line. A halter was provided and, accompanied by a Signaller (Corporal Collins, I believe it was), we started on our journey. As the road was being shelled at intervals the task of leading and driving the beast was at times a bit exciting, but eventually it was safely handed over about midnight. The 17th was keeping up its reputation for collecting salvage, but as far as I know, that was the only occasion on which a live ox had figured on a Battalion indent' (Mr. B. B. Pidcock, late C.Q.M.S. D Coy.).

The raiding party consisted of Lieutenant Rolf and 25 other ranks. The raid was successful and 1 German officer and 9 other ranks were captured, the Fusiliers losing 2 men wounded and 1 missing.

On the 11th of November, 1918, when the Armistice came into force, the 17th Royal Fusiliers were at Preux au Sart.¹ Their fighting days were over, but as this history shows, they

¹ Casualties during November were 3 other ranks killed, 19 wounded, 1 missing.

Honours and awards—Captain D. G. Gibson, bar to M.C.; Military Medal—Sergeant A. Birch, Private F. Irvine, Sergeant A. Macdonald, Private A. W. Sinnicks, Lance-Corporal E. Helcoop, Lance-Corporal T. Rose, Private J. Jarman, Lance-Corporal H. H. Hearne, Lance-Corporal W. Smith, Private J. S. Dawson, Private H. J. Nibbs, Private S. Hubbard, Sergeant T. W. Elliott, Corporal H. Bowles, Private A. E. Bowler, Private A. T. Smeathers.

The December diary has four 'Mentions in Despatches'—Lieut.-Colonel W. C. Smith, Captain and Quartermaster J. H. W. Gray, Captain A. L. Felton and Private T. H. Phillips.

had 'fought the good fight' and they too could share the following eulogy by General Haig of the troops under his command:

'Throughout all those years and amid all the hopes and disappointments they brought with them, the confidence of our troops in final victory never wavered. Their courage and resolution rose superior to every test, their cheerfulness never failing, however terrible the conditions in which they lived and fought. By the long road they trod with so much faith and with such devoted and self-sacrificing bravery we have arrived at victory.'

CONCLUSION

WHEN hostilities ceased at 11 a.m. on the 11th of November, 1918, a great silence fell upon the battlefield. There were no frantic cheers or wild scenes, such as were being enacted in every city, town and village throughout the United Kingdom, indeed throughout the world. There are other ways of celebrating a great victory than in flag-waving and the Army chose the finer way. For there were hundreds of thousands who had not come through: who lay somewhere beneath the troubled earth of France and Flanders, asleep until the Judgment Day. They were loved comrades and messmates, they had given their lives to help forward the great Cause of Victory, they had given

‘all that mankind can give,
that we might live!’

And as the ‘cease fire’ sounded officers and men in silence turned themselves to think—what of the morrow?

The 17th Royal Fusiliers marched with the

2nd Division into Germany as part of the Army of Occupation. At Christmas, 1918, the Battalion was quartered at Duren where the Colours were presented to the Battalion, which now find an honoured place in Warlingham Church, above the Battalion Memorial and Roll of Honour.

In 1919 the 17th Royal Fusiliers returned to England and were demobilized, but the Battalion still 'lives', for after the War the Old Comrades Association was formed with General Sir Bindon Blood, G.C.B., Honorary Colonel of the Battalion, as first President, Major J. Hole, M.C., as the first Honorary Secretary, Captain Murgatroyd and Corporal C. Windsor acting subsequently in the same capacity. The Association is very strong (having a membership of something over 900) and the Committee, which meets in London under the Chairmanship of Brigadier-General S. V. P. Weston, works very hard in their endeavours to further the interests and objects of the Association, which are to keep green the memory of those other Fusiliers who are no more, but who left behind them certain obligations:

'If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep though Poppies grow
In Flanders fields.'

APPENDICES

THE BATTALION SCOUTS

THIS section was formed in March, 1916, while the Battalion was in the line near Bully Grenay (just after taking over from the French) where we had billets.

It originally consisted of Lieutenant Ricketts (A Company) Privates C. T. Davis and J. A. Shargool (A Company), Private Burgess (C Company) and Privates Towne and Champ (D Company).

At this time the Scouts reported to Battalion H.Q. each evening that the Battalion were in the line, and after doing 'their little piece' and reporting the result were privileged to return to their billet in Bully Grenay.

After leaving this part of the line, however, it was impracticable for the section to go out of the trenches each night.

All were extremely keen, and although unlucky to lose Lieutenant Ricketts very quickly, the remainder, which now included Lance-Corporal Burr (then spelt Boehr) of B Company (and another C Company man whose name I have forgotten), carried on without loss until Burgess, a dare-devil still in his teens, was badly wounded in the raid on July 7th-8th, 1916. Champ was unfortunately killed at Trones Wood about three weeks later.

The Scouts were frequently successful in obtaining valuable information during their nocturnal prowls which were carried out by groups of two or three members lucky enough to get the job. More than once Lieutenant Joelson accompanied a group—to the enlivenment of all concerned.

Davis once spent a whole 24 hours out in No Man's Land near Bully Grenay observing the enemy's movements—going out one evening and returning with his report and a fine German helmet the next.

One night Shargool ran into a German patrol and brought down one of the enemy with his rifle. The patrol got away, leaving behind a bomber's belt, saturated with blood.

Towne was the humorist of the Section, and his whimsical whispers caused many an involuntary chuckle, often when silence was extremely desirable.

Burr and Shargool were seriously wounded on November 13th–16th, soon after which Davis went home for a Commission and poor Towne was killed.

So ended a sporting combination that had been happy and successful.

RAID JULY 7th/8th, 1916

Various groups had reconnoitred the sap which was to be raided—including the Officers taking part, the Senior N.C.O.'s of the party and the Battalion Scouts.

There had been heavy rain for some time beforehand and the shell-holes round about were full of water.

Lance-Corporals Burr and Shargool went out about

an hour before the raid was to take place and laid the tape to guide the party to the 'jumping-off' spot.

The Artillery put down a box barrage while the sap was subjected to a short but terrific strafe of 'toffee-apples', after which the party dashed into the wire.

Apparently no surprise had been sprung on the enemy. The wire was by no means demolished and entry into the sap was not easy.

Captain Stewart of A Company could see the difficulty and stalked calmly through a gap in the wire and directed operations until he fell badly wounded.

Lieutenant Stanley Wootton was badly shaken by concussion, but after the command to evacuate the trench had been given he refused to go back until he had found Captain Stewart, and it was some time after the latter had been helped back by Lance-Corporal Burr that Lieutenant Wootton was found groping through mud and water trying to find the Captain and was persuaded to return to our lines.

In the meantime Lance-Corporal Shargool had found his fellow-scout Burgess and another raider badly wounded inside the German wire, and after vainly trying to drag the former through the wire got him into the cover of a dry shell-hole and went back for assistance.

By this time the Germans had heavily manned their sap and were making things very uncomfortable anywhere near their wire.

Lieutenant Eric Roper (the then adjutant), Private 'Canary' Wiltshire and another stretcher-bearer volunteered to return with Shargool, and while the stretcher-bearers got away with Burgess Lieutenant Roper calmly

lifted the other wounded man up and walked back with him over his shoulder.

All this in face of a shower of bombs and heavy rifle and machine-gun fire and in the bright light of numerous Verey lights.

RE OPPY WOOD

My recollections of the above are more or less (scrappy). One incident of interest to the Battalion should be that of Harry Rowe's D.C.M. He, as you know, had unfortunately been reduced from C.Q.M.S. and transferred to A Company as private. Being sorry for him and having an inquiry from Battalion H.Q. for a man who understood milking pigeons, I sent him on the job.

Whilst on Intelligence work in the attack with the Oxford and Bucks he showed great resource and pluck in routing some Jerry snipers who had worked round the rear of our troops and were inflicting heavy casualties. Oppy also cost us quite a number of our original 1914 men, our greatest sorrow was the difficulty in evacuating the wounded. Although we did our utmost it was very distressing to hear them calling for help and to be unable to do as much as we should have wished. One very bright event in my chequered career happened here. As you know getting rations up to the front line was a problem owing to the exposed position and the job of finding the various companies. One night a (to me for ever blessed) fatigue merchant left a sandbag containing Mr. Panting's rations for me by mistake.

Not knowing exactly where Mr. Panting was and upon investigation finding the bag contained a bottle of whisky,

50 Gold Flake and sundry other dainty morsels, we, Sergeants Stokes, Lowndes and Porter (and myself), decided that sooner than risk the bottle getting broken by a shell or something we had better dispose of it ourselves. While doing so we fully appreciated how the Yids must have felt in the desert when the manna fell from the skies. My digestion was nearly upset shortly after by a man turning up with my own rations. However, as there was nothing more breakable than a tin of bully in it, we decided to send a man along with it to try and find Mr. Panting. Happily he was successful and returned with Mr. Panting's grateful acknowledgements.

On the night the Division was relieved we had to form a Composite Company to operate with the incoming troops in the next day's attack.

I was almost prostrated with joy to hear I had been selected C.S.M. of this Company commanded by Lieutenant Stone, and composed of officers servants, grooms, pioneers and other details.

All through the still watches of the night we toiled to form these shock-(ing) troops into the necessary bombing, Lewis-gun and rifle sections. One man on being supplied with Mills bombs thought they were a new form of iron ration. However, they came through like only 17th R.F. can do, and as the Hymn says, 'We're Here! because We're Here!'

Sorry I cannot oblige with warlike details, but in passing I should like to say that the sordidness and strife was almost compensated by the companionship and comradeship of such good fellows as the Empire Battalion, and if ever such a situation arose again, all I should wish would be to serve again in such company.

ROLL OF HONOUR

OFFICERS

BAKER, Bertram Reginald, 2/Lt.	FLETCHER, Robert Henry, Lt. (killed with 17th)
BEALE, Ernest Frederick, 2/Lt.	GADDUM, Russell Charles Sydney, 2/Lt.
BENZECRY, Samuel, 2/Lt.	GREY, John Hunter Wood, T/Capt. and Qtm.
BRODIE, Sidney Edward, 2/Lt.	HARVEY, R. W., 2/Lt.
CAMPBELL, Frederick Charles, 2/Lt.	HUGILL, Edwin Abbott, Capt.
COCKER, Arthur Wilfred King- sley, 2/Lt.	LELIEVRE, Albert Frederick Henry, 2/Lt.
CONSTERDINE-CHADWICK, Ro- bert Thompson Conster- dine, Lt.	LUCAS, John, 2/Lt.
DRUMMOND, Samuel Frederick, 2/Lt.	MENZIES, Alastair Forbes, D.S.O., Lt.
EDWARDS, Wilfred William, M.C., 2/Lt.	POLLAK, Otto Dennis, Lt.
ETHERIDGE, Hugh Dimsdale, M.C., M.M., 2/Lt.	ROPER, Eric Walter, Lt. and Adj.
FERGUSON, Robert Arthur, 2/Lt. (att. 17th Bn.)	SAYER, Leonard Charles, 2/Lt. SHERWOOD, Clement Walter, 2/Lt.

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SPICER, George Henry, 2/Lt.
STONE, Walter Napleton,
V.C., A/Capt. (att. 17th
Batt.)

TARDUGNO, Ray, 2/Lt.
TAYLOR, Clives Wailes, M.C.,
2/Lt.

UNDERWOOD, Edmund Poole,
2/Lt. (att. 29th Bn.)

WILLIAMS, William Frederick,
2/Lt.

YELLEN, Cyril Francis, 2/Lt.
(att. 17th Bn.)

WARRANT OFFICERS, N.C.O.'s AND MEN

ABBEY, Laurence
ADAMS, Charles Edward
ADAMS, Percy
ADDISON, Harry William
AFFLECK, Stanley William
AGER, Morris George
AGER, Percy
ALLUM, William
ALLEN, Alfred Henry
ANEY, William Robert
ANSELL, Charles Henry
ARCHIBALD, William Nicol
ARNOLD, Alfred
ARNOLD, Wilfred James
ARROL, Colin Archibald
ASHWELL, Frederick William
ATKIN, Thomas
ATTFIELD, Frederick John
AUSTIN, Henry John
AVIS, Thomas Gee Llewelyn

BAILEY, Leonard
BAILEY, Reginald Visard
BAKER, Harold Frederick

BANG, Jorgen Kernerup
BARNARD, Harry
BARNES, Harvey Arthur
BARTLETT, Arthur James
BARTON, Edwin George
BASKEYFIELD, Arthur
BASSETT, Alfred William
BEACH, Albert
BEALE, Henry Stanley
BEAUCHAMP, Ernest George
BECK, Rudolph Charles
BECKENHAM, Charles Harry
BECKETT, Henry
BELL, John Charles
BENNETT, Arthur Edward
BENNETT, Edgar
BENNETT, Reginald Howard
BENNETT, Walter George
BENTLEY, Arthur Francis John
BILL, Horace
BISHOP, Arthur Cecil
BISHOP, George Ewart
BISHOPP, Stephen
BLACK, Joseph

MORRIS, Walter Stanley
MOYCE, Theodore Benjamin

ACEY, Frank Byrne
 ADMORE, Arthur Edward
 PAMPLIN, George
 PALMER, James
 PARKINSON, Henry Oscar
 PARKER, Frederick
 PARKER, John
 PARRIS, John
 PEARSON, John
 PERKINS, Ernest Richard
 PERKINS, Thomas
 PEDDER, William
 PEVERELL, Albert
 PERCIVAL, Matthew
 PHAIR, Tom
 PERRYMAN, Nathaniel
 PHILLIPS, Alfred
 PHILLIPS, Clarence
 PHILLIPS, Thomas Francis
 PHILP, Francis Leonard
 PIDGEON, Walter
 PITT, Edgar
 PLANZI, Arnold
 PLAYLE, William Springfield
 PONTON, Harold Frederick
 POOLE, Henry William John
 POOLE, Victor Leslie
 POTTER, Walter Hanson
 POULTON, Henry Arthur
 POYNER, Francis Lawrence
 PRELLO, Albert
 PRENTICE, Charles

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COLLETT, Thomas Arthur	DEXTER, Walter
CONNINGTON, Charles Edward	DIDDAMS, Frederick George
COOK, Robert James	DILLOW, Jack
COOKE, Harry	DILNOT, Alan
COOKE, Arthur Samuel	DOPSON, Stanley
COOKE, Percival	DOWNHAM Charles
COOPER, Frederick Ernest	DUKE, Ramsay
COPSON, Ernest Howard	DULIEU, Ernest John
CORNFORD, Arthur Henry	DUMBELL, Leslie Sidney
CORP, Alfred Thomas	DUNN, Charles Harold
CORY, Bernard Horace	DUNN, Joseph
COULSON, Horace	DYSON, Arthur
COX, George Oswald	
COYLE, Frederick James	ENSER, Edward William
CRAWFORD, George	ELLIOTT, Edward John
CROFT, Harry	ELLIOTT, Thomas William
CUFF, Albert	ELLIS, Samuel
CURTICE, Cecil Maurice	ELMS, William George
CURTIS, Ernest Golds	ETHERIDGE, Sydney
CUTHBERT, Arthur George	EVANS, Edward Henry
	EVANS, John Stanley
DADSWELL, George Charles	
DAISLEY, Alfred	FAKE, William Herbert
DAVIS, Charles	FARNISH, Arthur
DAVIES, Owen	FARROW, Bertram
DAVIES, Walter John	FELL, Frank Halyburton
DAVIES, Charles	FERGUSON, Frank Louis
DAWKINS, Albert	FIELD, George
DAWSON, Albert	FIELD, James Allen
DAY, George Harold	FINCH, Charles James
DEAN, Frank	FINCH, John
DEARDEN, Harold	FINK, Frederick
DE JOHNS, Percy	FINNEY, Thomas
DENNETT, Thomas Sutton	FITCH, William Henry
DEVLIN, Henry	FLEMING, Herbert

FLETCHER, Percy Fred
 FOLEY, Leonard Louis
 FLYNN, Samuel
 FOWLER, John
 FRAMPTON, Joseph
 FRANCIS, Alfred
 FRASER, Arthur Clark
 FRIPP, Ernest John
 FROST, George
 FRY, Leonard Harry
 FULBROOK, Reginald

GRAHAM, Sydney
 GRANT, Duncan
 GRAY, John
 GRAY, Robert William
 GREEN, John Nicholas Walter
 GREEN, Robert
 GRIFFIN, Frederick
 GRIFFIN, Percy Harold
 GRIMES, Archibald Edward
 GRINGER, Arthur
 GUEST, William

GALLON, Joseph Foster
 GANE, Francis Grant
 GARDNER, George
 GARMAN, Arthur
 GARNER, Douglas Haydn
 GARNER, James
 GARRAWAY, Wilfred Charles
 GASKINS, Bertie
 GIBBARD, William Dan
 GIBBONS, Victor John
 GILDER, Albert Charles
 GILLIES, Edmund
 GIMSON, John Edward
 GLASS, Roy Fitzherbert
 GLOVER, Howard Maurice
 GODDARD, George
 GODFREY, Frank Edward
 GOLDING, Albert Edward
 GOLDSACK, John George William
 GOODERHAM, William James
 GORDON, Douglas
 GRAHAM, Charles

HACKETT, Thomas Edwin
 HADFIELD, Jack
 HAINES, William
 HAMILTON, Victor
 HARBER, W. C. C.
 HARRISON, Arthur Frederick
 HARRISON, Frank
 HART, Richard Oliver
 HARTLEY, Wilbert
 HARVEY, Reginald George
 Frederick
 HASTINGS, Frederick Lawrence
 Thomas
 HAYES, Alfred
 HAWKINS, Walter Joseph
 HAWLEY, William Frederick
 HEASMAN, John
 HEATH, James
 HEDGER, Albert James
 HELLER, Abraham
 HEMPSSELL, John
 HEMPSTEAD, Frederick
 HENSTOCK, John William

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HERRING, Thomas Edward
 HILLS, Arthur Alfred
 HIRST, George
 HOLLAND, Reginald Seabright
 HOLMES, Henry Wallace
 HOLMAN, John William
 HOLT, William Henry
 HOLTER, Jesse
 HOPKINS, Alfred Francis
 HOPKINS, John
 HOWARD, William
 HOWE, Henry
 HUGHES, David Briggs
 HUGGETT, William
 HURST, George
 HUNT, William Harry
 HUSK, Theodore
 HUSSEY, Charles Henry
 HYDE, George

INEE, Thomas Pelham
 INGRAM, William Ernest

JACKSON, Alfred Albert
 JACKSON, Cornelius James
 JACKSON, Laurence
 JAGGER, Edwin
 JAMES, George William
 JEFFREYS, Ernest George
 JENNER, Levi
 JONES, William Victor

KENDALL, Norman Bernard
 KING, George Alfred

KING, Harry
 KNIGHT, Abdel William
 Horatio
 KNIGHT, James
 KNIGHT, Norman Hine

LABRUM, Main Rolfe
 LAKE, John William
 LAMB, Harold James D.
 LANGRIDGE, Ernest Edward
 LANE, Reginald David
 LARSEN, Arthur Johannes
 LAWRENCE, Charles Frederick
 LEACH, William
 LAWRENCE, Edward Ernest
 LEIGH, James Alfred
 LEIGH, John
 LEPPARD, Frank William
 LEWIN, Edmund George
 LEWIS, Charles Osborne
 LILLEY, Horace Roland
 LINTOTT, Raymond Frederick
 Richard

LIPSCOMBE, Reginald George
 LIVINGSTONE, William
 LOATES, James Arthur
 LOCKETT, Henry Walter
 LONG, Arthur Walter
 LOOKER, Alfred Charles

MACEY, Frederick William
 Henry
 MADER, John
 MAJOR, Francis Anthony

MALIN, Arthur George
 MALLINSON, Philip Scholes
 MANCHETT, George William
 MANNING, Ernest
 MARRINER, Joseph Thomas
 MARRIOTT, Frank
 MARSH, James
 MATHER, Frederick James
 MATTHEWS, Edward John
 MAY, John Frederick
 MAYHOOK, Sidney Claude
 MCCRUDDEN, John Henry
 MEAD, Arthur John
 MELLOW, Thomas
 MERRYWEATHER, Arthur
 MIDDLEGE, John
 MILES, Jack
 MINES, Reginald Arthur
 MISSIN, Herbert Edward
 MOLE, Charles Arthur
 MOORE, Sidney
 MOORE, Samuel
 MOOREY, Frank Pitson
 MONK, Jack
 MORTON, Robert Norman
 MUNK, Charles John
 MURPHY, Thomas Cormolly
 MUTTITT, William Charles
 MUTTON, Robert James

NADIN, Edgar
 NEWMAN, Alfred James
 NICOL, Robert Bruce
 NORMAN, John Herbert

NORRIS, Walter Stanley
 NOYCE, Theodore Benjamin
 PACEY, Frank Byrne
 PADMORE, Arthur Edward
 PAMPLIN, George
 PALMER, James
 PARKINSON, Henry Oscar
 PARKER, Frederick
 PARKER, John
 PARRIS, John
 PEARSON, John
 PERKINS, Ernest Richard
 PERKINS, Thomas
 PEDDER, William
 PEVERELL, Albert
 PERCIVAL, Matthew
 PHAIR, Tom
 PERRYMAN, Nathaniel
 PHILLIPS, Alfred
 PHILLIPS, Clarence
 PHILLIPS, Thomas Francis
 PHILP, Francis Leonard
 PIDGEON, Walter
 PITT, Edgar
 PLANZI, Arnold
 PLAYLE, William Springfield
 PONTON, Harold Frederick
 POOLE, Henry William John
 POOLE, Victor Leslie
 POTTER, Walter Hanson
 POULTON, Henry Arthur
 POYNER, Francis Lawrence
 PRELLO, Albert
 PRENTICE, Charles

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PROVINES, Joseph
PUDDICK, Henry James
PULLEN, Robert
PURLAND, Arthur Albert

RANDALL, Alfred George
RANDALL, Alfred Henry
RANDALL, Wilfred George
RAWSON, Thomas
READER, Thomas John
REED, Sidney Nelson
REEVES, Joseph Basil
REEVES, Robert Barnard
RENNIE, Archibald
RICHARDS, Stanley
RICHARDSON, Alfred
RICHARDSON, Charles
RICHARDSON, George
ROBINSON, George
RODDES, James Alfred
ROLF, John
ROLINSON, David
ROOK, Harry William
ROSE, Charles John
ROSENBERG, David
RUDDOCK, Edward
RUFFLES, Stanley William
RUSHBROOK, Arthur Leonard

SADLER, Bertram Sydney
SARGEANT, Ernest Glover
SAUNDERS, Frederick
SAVAGE, Henry
SCARFE, Thomas Reginald

SCHLOSSER, Henry John
Roland
SEARLE, Frederick James
SHAIRP, Walter Vernon
SHARLAND, John Dudley
SHARMAN, James Archibald
SHAW, Willie Archibald
SHEARS, Henry
SHEPARD, Henry George
Wood
SHEPHERD, Harry Thomas
William
SHIRVILL, Harry
SHORT, Henry
SIBBONS, John William
SIM, George Hedderwick
SIMMONDS, George
SINCLAIR, James
SINNETT, Joseph
SKIPP, John Brothwood
SLACK, Joseph
SLADE, Albert
SLADE, Joseph
SLAWSON, Cyril Reginald
SMAIL, James David
SMITH, Charles Stanley
SMITH, George Francis
SMITH, John Thomas
SMITH, Richard
SMITH, William Bernard
SPARK, Alexander
SPEAR, Ernest
SPOONER, Wesley
STAGG, James
STANFORD, Charles

STAPLES, Walter Ernest
 STAPLEY, Allan Vernon
 STEER, Alfred Edward
 STEER, Phillip George
 STEVENSON, Stanley Harold
 STONE, John William
 STONE, Lawrence William
 SUMNER, Robert Charles
 SUTCLIFFE, Harry
 SUTCLIFFE, Robert William
 SUTTON, Harold
 SWAN, Sidney Horace
 SWORD, Edward Franklin

 TAMPLIN, Leonard
 TANDY, Charles
 TARRING, William
 TAYLOR, Harry
 TESTER, Mark
 THOMSON, Frank
 THOMSON, Richard Augustus
 THURSTON, Albert George
 TILLEY, Frederick
 TOMLIN, Herbert Henry
 TOWNE, Frank William
 TOWNSEND, Douglas James
 TUCKER, Cecil
 TUFFS, Frederick
 TURNER, Herbert James
 TURNER, John Bernard
 TWENTYMAN, Joseph Edward
 TWINBERROW, Arthur George

 UTTERIDGE, Albert William
 UTTLEY, Arnold Sutcliffe

UTTLEY, Sam
 UPTON, Frederick

 WADDELL, William George
 WALKER, Henry Albert
 WALKER, John George
 WALLACE, William Charles
 WALSH, Joseph
 WASSELL, George Charles
 WATSON, Frederick Richard
 WATTS, George
 WATTS, Graham Reginald
 Garner
 WAYLING, Herbert Victor
 WEATHERLEY, George Fred
 WEBB, George
 WEBB, William Richard
 WEBSTER, William
 WELCH, James William
 WELCH, John
 WELLS, Walter Arthur
 WESTERN, Charles Joseph
 WHEELER, Frank Robert
 WHITE, Ernest
 WHITE, Robert
 WHITE, Samuel
 WHITMORE, Jonathan
 WHITTAKER, Samuel
 WAYBROW, Thomas
 WILLIAMS, Frederick
 WILSON, John
 WILSON, Walter
 WILTSHIRE, Robert
 WILTSHIRE, Harry
 WINTER, Charles

300 THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS

WOLFE, William Frederick

WRIGHT, Charles Richard

WOOD, Robert Arthur

WOOD, William Mackenzie

WOODTHORPE, Francis Wil-
liam Henry

YOUNG, Thomas Richard

YOUNG, Harold Robert

WOODWARDS, Charles George

YOUNGS, George Robert

WOOTTON, James Allen

YOUNGS, Frank

THE COMPLETE ROLL OF OFFICERS, N.C.O.'s AND MEN OF THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS WHO PROCEEDED OVERSEAS TO FRANCE ON 16TH NOVEMBER, 1915

The Commanding Officer (Lieut.-Colonel W. G. Grant) said:

"The Battalion paraded at 5.45 a.m., on the 16th November, 1915, for service in France. We embarked at Folkestone immediately upon arrival. The Battalion was at full strength—not a single absentee. I understood that this was a record for the Division. I have a shrewd suspicion that we crossed to France one man in excess of our authorized strength, but I did not make any searching enquiries for particulars."

OFFICERS

Lieut.-Colonel.

Grant, W. G. (R. of O.)

Majors.

Turner, R. (S.R.)
Winnington-Barnes, A. E. (T.C.)

Captains.

Farquharson, D. (T.C.)
Stewart, C. F. S. (T.C.)
Hole, S. J. M. (T.C.)
Parsons, L. E. (T.C.)
Bott, J. A. (T.C.)
Beauford, F. S. (T.C.)
Cotterill, E. W. S. (T.C.)

Lieutenants.

Richmond, E. (T.C.)
Garratt, W. A. (T.C.)
Roper, E. (T.C.)
Hamilton, R. H. (T.C.)
Flint, P. W. (T.C.)
Wootton, S. (T.C.)
Pollak, O. D. (T.C.)

2nd-Lieutenants.

Ricketts, R. J. (T.C.)
Somerset, A. C. (T.C.)
Murgatroyd, J. O. (T.C.)
Lavarack, F. S. (T.C.)
Parry, E. C. (T.C.)
Hewett, S. H. (T.C.)
Hugill, E. A. (T.C.)
Joelson, S. H. (T.C.)
Young, A. P. (T.C.)
Baker, B. R. (T.C.)
Roberts, H. W. (T.C.)
Lavarack, A. W. (T.C.)

THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS

Adjutant: Captain E. G. Mackenzie (T.C.).

Quartermaster: Lieutenant G. F. Blakesley (T.C.).

Medical Officer: Lieutenant H. T. Chatfield, R.A.M.C. (S.R.).

N.C.O.'s AND MEN

HEADQUARTERS STAFF

<i>Detail.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Company.</i>
Regtl. Sergt.-Major . . .	Barton, J. E.	D
Regtl. Qmr.-Sergt. . . .	Blott, W. L.	A
Orderly Room Sergt. . .	Finch, D. J. J.	B
Orderly Room Corporal .	Wellman, R. S.	B
Sergt. Cook	Spencer, G. R.	B
Transport Sergt.	Lewis, J. J.	B
Shoemaker Sergt.	Snow, J. T.	B
Transport L/Cpl.	Weller, R. G.	D
Transport Driver	Aldridge, R.	B
" "	Clarke, H. V.	D
" "	English, P. C.	A
" "	Folkhard, H.	D
" "	Hempstead, F.	C
" "	Hinton, C. R.	D
" "	Lucking, T.	B
" "	McGrath, M.	B
" "	Pargeter, M.	B
" "	Smith, B. N.	D
" "	Weston, S. M.	B
Batmen. Private	Forster, F. H.	A
" "	Nash, C. E.	B
" "	Noble, H.	D
" "	Thompson, B. J.	D
" "	Williams, H.	D
Pioneers. Sergt.	Allen, F.	B
" Private	Gill, S.	B
" "	Green, A. C.	C
" "	Knight, A. B.	B
" "	Neal, J.	C
" "	Parker, P.	C
" "	Peckham, F.	A
" "	Porter, H.	D
" "	Silcock, G.	A
" "	Trott, J. J.	A
" "	Williams, J. J.	D
Signallers. Sergt.	Murdock, C.	B
" Corpl.	Eddells, —	C
" "	Molyneux, H. T.	C
" L/Cpl.	Arnold, A.	D
" "	Beck, R. C.	A
" "	Dean, R. C.	D

ROLL OF OFFICERS, N.C.O.'s AND MEN 303

<i>Detail.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Company.</i>
Signallers. L/Cpl.	Kiteloy, F.	D
"	Sands, J. R.	B
"	Shreeves, H. B.	D
"	Wilkins, B. N.	A
Private	Bond, F.	B
"	Hanow, R. W.	B
"	Newmarch, H.	A
"	Pritchard, B.	A
"	Scott, A. P.	B
"	Swale, W.	C
"	Wolff, B. T.	C
Stretcher Bearer	Clatworthy, A.	A
" "	Daisley, A.	B
" "	Findley, L. J.	C
" "	Forster, S. H.	A
" "	Fox, F. W.	D
" "	Green, R.	C
" "	Harper, R. J.	B
" "	Miles, J. S.	C
" "	Neale, J.	B
" "	Rowland, G.	B
" "	Sanders, E. R. G.	D
" "	Tromp, P. M.	D
" "	Tromp, C.	D
" "	Ward, H.	C
" "	Whyte, E. R.	A
" "	Worsfold, C.	A
M.O.'s Orderly	L/Cpl. Tilley, P.	D
" "	Gissing, S. J.	D
Attached. " Armourer Sergt.	Steane, J.	D

Water Duties.

L/Cpl.	Ward Fox, H.	A
Private	Dale, C.	C
"	Rolfe, J. E.	D
"	Scott, E.	C
"	Witt, F. M.	B

Machine Gun Section.

Sergeant	Lawledge, F. M.	C
"	Charles, C. J.	D
Corporal	Johnson, —	C
L/Corporal	Charles, S. J.	D
Private	Allen, H.	C
"	Ashwell, T. H.	A
"	Barton, H. D.	A
"	Beale, J.	D
"	Bennett, R. H.	C
"	Bligh, P. A.	C

304 THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS

<i>Detail.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Company.</i>
Private	Bruce, S. T.	C
"	Garner, D. H.	A
"	Jolly, E.	D
"	Joseph, W.	C
"	Jupp, A. S.	D
"	Margerison, J.	A
"	Mattocks, T.	C
"	Moakes, C.	B
"	Pitman, E. A. S.	C
"	Provinces, J.	C
"	Ripsher, H. J.	C
"	Searle, C. J. D.	C
"	Smeed, A. E.	A
"	Smith, A.	B
"	Watkins, E.	D
"	Wicks, P. S.	B
"	Williams, A. R.	A
"	Woodville, P. C.	D
Driver	Baker, S.	B
"	Beston, W. J.	A
"	Glass, R.	A
"	Harrison, A. M.	D
"	Mansbridge, E.	A
"	White, E.	A

'A' COMPANY

<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>
C.S.M.	Parrock, J.	L/Cpl.	Challis, J. R.	Pte.	Adams, A.
C.Q.M.S.	Newman, A. J.	"	Chapman, S. L.	"	Arnold, W. J.
Sergt.	Andrews, A.	"	Cousins, L.	"	Astrop, W.
"	Corbett, R. S.	"	Davies, C. T.	"	Aaker, J. P.
"	Gibbons, P. J.	"	Day, G. H.	"	Allen, F. J.
"	Ryan, —	"	Daish, F.	"	Anscombe, C. V.
"	Vizer, J. H.	"	Dennis, D. S.	"	Afleck, S.
"	Walker, D. J.	"	Down, A.	"	Aubusson, F.
L/Sergt.	Duffy, B.	"	Gibbons, W.	"	Allen, A. F.
"	Ogle, A.	"	Heath, B.	"	Abrahams, H.
Cpl.	Bailey, C. G.	"	Hussey, C. H.	"	Birkin, H.
"	Harper, W. J.	"	James, A. W. F.	"	Brooks, C. W.
"	Hewlett, C. H.	"	Horten, R. N.	"	Beckingham, C. N.
"	Pidcock, B. B.	"	Pemall, R. W.	"	Brown, W.
"	Slack, J.	"	Richards, S.	"	Bentley, A. L.
"	Stokes, A. L.	"	Shargool, J. A.	"	Bate, L. R.
"	Temple, H. P.	"	Toplay, W. J.	"	Brown, A.
"	Wilkinson, H.	"	Wise, H.	"	Bergrl, B.
L/Cpl.	Ash, H. W.	Pte.	Allen, E. N.	"	Briggs, W. H.
"	Bevan, J. T.	"	Abbey, L.	"	Brook, L.
"	Booth, J. H.	"	Aslin, W. H.	"	Bicknell, G.

ROLL OF OFFICERS, N.C.O.'s AND MEN 305

Rank. Name.

Pte. Braine, S.
 „ Bertrand, W. T.
 „ Bailey, J.
 „ Brickett, R. H.
 „ Berry, J.
 „ Byron, H. H.
 „ Bower, T.
 „ Badger, F. H.
 „ Butler, J.
 „ Brunt, G.
 „ Booth, J.
 „ Buttle, F. H.
 „ Bennett, E.
 „ Carter, W. A.
 „ Chapman, H. S.
 „ Catlin, W. H.
 „ Carter, O. E.
 „ Cox, C. H. S.
 „ Chamberlain, C. W.
 „ Curnow, F. E.
 „ Caines, G. N.
 „ Cawley, E. B.
 „ Connington, C.
 „ Coomber, C.
 „ Cogley, J. C.
 „ Clarke, A. C.
 „ Carvey, W. T.
 „ Cooke, P.
 „ Cox, Albert.
 „ Cox, Alwin.
 „ Crapper, M.
 „ Caines, C. B.
 „ Dickinson, B. E.
 „ Dawson, W.
 „ Day, C.
 „ Davis, W. J.
 „ Diddock, G. W.
 „ Doherty, B.
 „ Driscoll, A. R.
 „ Diddams, F. G.
 „ Dumball, L. S.
 „ Evans, J.
 „ Everest, A.
 „ Edser, L. W.
 „ Foot, F. P.
 „ Fleming, F.
 „ Farmer, G. T.
 „ Freeman, R.

Rank. Name.

Pte. Fox, S.
 „ Green, J. N. W.
 „ Gillan, W.
 „ Goldsack, L. J.
 „ Goddard, H.
 „ Gregg, V. R.
 „ Garner, A. W. B.
 „ Goddard, J. J.
 „ Glover, E. A.
 „ Gillies, C.
 „ Green, E. T.
 „ Grinstead, C. H.
 „ Hayden, L. R.
 „ Hall, R.
 „ Humphries, E.
 „ Hallowes, E. H.
 „ Harvey, G. J.
 „ Hoare, F.
 „ Haytor, F. W.
 „ Hurst, G.
 „ Hawley, H.
 „ Hearson, J.
 „ Herbert, W. S. C.
 „ Illman, G. T.
 „ Ingram, A. E.
 „ Ison, A.
 „ Irvine, F.
 „ Johnson, J.
 „ Jutson, F. A.
 „ Kenshole, L. J.
 „ Kenny, D. T.
 „ King, T.
 „ King, H.
 „ Landon, E. J.
 „ Lobb, E. R.
 „ Laybourne, H.
 „ Loates, J. A.
 „ Laws, A. B.
 „ Lavender, F.
 „ Moore, H.
 „ Misch, C.
 „ Moore, S.
 „ Marchant, F. H.
 „ Merritt, H. G.
 „ Heikleham, D. L.
 „ Marsden, W. A.
 „ Mortan, B.
 „ Martin, F. E.

Rank. Name.

Pte. Mead, A. S.
 „ Moscrop, C.
 „ Murdock, T.
 „ McBrain, F.
 „ Nadin, E.
 „ Newington, N. G.
 „ Ottway, W. G.
 „ O'Kell, A. A.
 „ Orton, F. W.
 „ Pears, H.
 „ Parsons, W.
 „ Popplewell, A. J.
 „ Pidgeon, W.
 „ Rice, G.
 „ Roper, C.
 „ Royer, H. E.
 „ Robinson, A.
 „ Raybould, A.
 „ Rossoll, C.
 „ Rowell, J.
 „ Rudling, A. E.
 „ Saxl, J.
 „ Shaw, H. C.
 „ Sutton, H.
 „ Sutcliffe, T.
 „ Sutcliffe, R. W.
 „ Sim, G. H.
 „ Smith, E.
 „ Shairp, V.
 „ Starling, M.
 „ Scott, P. D.
 „ Sergeant, E. J.
 „ Stone, H.
 „ Strudgeon, H.
 „ Slack, M.
 „ Stevens, R. S.
 „ Trotter, G.
 „ Tuck, L. M.
 „ Twiball, L.
 „ Thompson, S. M.
 „ Thompson, F. C.
 „ Tyler, E.
 „ Thorp, J.
 „ Tallett, T.
 „ Winterbotham, S.
 „ Wilde, W. F. B.
 „ Wiltshire, H.
 „ Winter, C.

306 THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS

Rank.	Name.	Rank.	Name.	Rank.	Name.
Pte.	Wright, C. R.	Pte.	West, E.	Pte.	Watts, C. A.
"	Woodcock, E.	"	Worren, G. W.	"	Young, C. E.
"	Watson, F. R.	"	Wortley, R. E.	"	Young, W. P.
"	Wood, W. G.	"	Watts, R. G.	"	Young, E. H.
"	Williamson, E.				

'B' COMPANY

C.S.M.	Shanks, C. S.	L/Cpl	Hobbs, P. L.	Pte.	Cutler, G. H.
C.Q.M.S.	Tarnag, W.	"	Hone, W. G.	"	Day, E. G.
Sergt.	Webb, T. H.	"	Hoppen, F.	"	Deakin, J.
"	Thorn, H.	"	Ketley, R. G.	"	De Gaye, J. A.
"	Timberlake, V.	"	Maynard, B. T.	"	Devlin, J. C.
"	A. H.	"	Myles, N. F.	"	Dexter, W.
"	Stubbs, J. A.	"	Randall, A. H.	"	Durand, E. G.
"	Sternberg, M.P.	"	Smith, W. B.	"	Edey, F. W.
"	Good, G. S.	"	Steljes, L.	"	Edwards, B.
"	Perfect, G. M.	"	Swan, S. H.	"	Edwards, J. W.
"	Lewis, —	"	Tweed, A. J.	"	England, F. W.
L. Sergt.	Carpenter, C.	"	Warner, B. T.	"	Evans, J. W.
"	Pickford, G. F.	"	Milledge, F. E.	"	Foster, A. E.
Corpl.	Gause, F. G.	Pte.	Ager, M. G.	"	Froggatt, A. E.
"	Cornelius, C. A.	"	Allen, H.	"	Garrett, C. T.
"	Butler, C. A.	"	Atkins, W.	"	Fulbrook, R.
"	Saver, T. E.	"	Atkinson, H.	"	Goddard, G.
"	Hughes, S. R.	"	Backhouse, W.	"	Grazier, J. H.
"	Fox, A. H.	"	Baker, A. H.	"	Griffin, P. H.
"	Garner, A.	"	Marsley, L.	"	Gunson, T. C.
"	Evers, J. B.	"	Bedford, J.	"	Haddon, T. R.
"	Milledge, P.	"	Bell, J. A.	"	Haigh, W.
L/Cpl	Self, G. F.	"	Bennett, P.	"	Halo, C. W.
"	Hunt, H. R.	"	Beswick, W.	"	Hall, C. W.
"	Bottjer, G. W.	"	Bibby, W.	"	Handscumbe, F.
"	Bridgland, A. T.	"	Birchall, H.	"	Harrison, A. R.
"	Brown, H.	"	Bishop, A. C.	"	Harrison, J.
"	Godfrey, H. E.	"	Blake, A. F. G.	"	Hasluck, C.
"	Salmon, A. N.	"	Bridger, R.	"	Hasluck, G.
"	Adams, C. E.	"	Brook, A. W.	"	Hawkins, W. J.
"	Boehr, C. R.	"	Brook, J. E.	"	Hawley, W. F.
"	Burrows, T. J.	"	Brown, C.	"	Hayes, F.
"	Cayless, C. W.	"	Buck, G.	"	Hempsill, J.
"	Cocking, J.	"	Burt, W.	"	Henstock, J. W.
"	Farrow, B.	"	Burcher, J. E. H.	"	Hill, R.
"	Fleming, H.	"	Callan, G. A.	"	Hitchcox, H.
"	Gibbs, R.	"	Carter, F. J.	"	Hix, S.
"	Grover, J.	"	Chipperfield, E.	"	Hobbs, R.
"	Harrington, E.	"	Cocking, F.	"	Holland, W.
"	S.	"	Coles, W. J.	"	Holmes, C. W. B.
"	High, P.	"	Croudace, H.	"	Hooton, S. H.

ROLL OF OFFICERS, N.C.O.'s AND MEN 307

<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>
Pte.	Hoppen, B.	Pte.	Pay, J. F.	Pte.	Squires, E. H.
"	Hunt, W. H.	"	Payne, R. G.	"	Stone, J. W.
"	Hutton, E.	"	Pearce, J.	"	Stow, W.
"	Jefferies, F. E.	"	Pearce, T. H.	"	Swift, J.
"	Keefe, E. H.	"	Pearce, J. H.	"	Walkey, T.
"	Keller, R. K.	"	Pearson, S.	"	Thake, C. F.
"	Kendall, N. B.	"	Penfold, S.	"	Theobald, L.
"	Kendle, J. F.	"	Penn, W.	"	Thomas, T. G.
"	Knight, A. E.	"	Phillips, A. G.	"	Tosh, C. E.
"	Lane, F. A.	"	Phillips, T. F.	"	Tufts, F.
"	Langham, T. R.	"	Pike, A. L.	"	Underwood, J.
"	Lee, J.	"	Planzi, A.	"	Vaughan, F.
"	Skinner, E. O.	"	Lawson, T.	"	Wagstaffe, H.
"	McFarlane, J. F.	"	Richmond, W.	"	Wallace, R.
"	Marriner, J. T.	"	Rivett, J. L.	"	Wallis, J.
"	Marshall, W. H.	"	Roddie, R. A. N.	"	Waterson, J.
"	Marshfield, H.	"	Rogers, J. T.	"	Watson, A. A.
"	Matthewman, H. W.	"	Rotherham, S.	"	Webster, H. A.
"	Mollor, J. F.	"	Saunders, A. S.	"	Welsh, J. W.
"	Mellors, E.	"	Saunders, J. D.	"	Wellham, F.
"	Miell, A. J.	"	Saxton, C. W.	"	Wells, W. R.
"	Miles, G.	"	Shaw, C.	"	Wetton, G. H.
"	Miles, H. J.	"	Shaw, E.	"	Whawell, L.
"	Mills, W.	"	Shaw, W. A.	"	White, N.
"	Mitchell, F. G.	"	Sherwood, C. W.	"	Williams, F.
"	Moore, S.	"	Shreeves, P. S.	"	Wilson, W.
"	Morrison, F.	"	Shurville, H.	"	Wiseman, F.
"	Mycroft, D.	"	Simpkins, E. W.	"	Woodthorpe, F. H.
"	Nathan, A.	"	Sinclair, A. J.	"	Wright, A. P.
"	New, J.	"	Smail, J. D.	"	Wright, V.
"	Noyce, T. B.	"	Smith, A. E.	"	Wyatt, L.
"	Osborne, A. G.	"	Smith, E. H.	"	Yarnold, D.
"	Pacey, F. D.	"	Spooner, F.	"	Young, —
"	Park, H. W.				

'C' COMPANY

C.S.M.	Haines, A.	Cpl.	Coleman, C. H.	L/Cpl.	Greensmith, E. B.
C.Q.M.S.	Roe, H.	"	Patton, S.	"	Sly, P. G.
Sergt.	Maby, M. S.	"	Northeast, S.	"	Lewindon, E.
"	Evans, M.	"	Bang, J. K.	"	Adams, C. A.
"	Skeels, F. R.	"	Mines, R.	"	Hepworth, B.
"	Drunton, T.	"	Kibblewhite, H. J. T.	"	Muller, J. P.
Sergt.	Cross, —	"	Fagg, C.	"	Smith, P. G.
"	Cade, J.	"	Matthews, H.	"	Brown, A. J.
"	Bailey, R. V.	"	Fletcher, R.	"	Reeves, R. B.
"	Schofield, J. H.	L/Cpl.	Harrison, F.	"	Spencer, P.
L/Sergt.	Baldwin, H. G.	"	Cooper, E.	"	Fawkes, C.
"	Brenchley, A.	"		"	

308 THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS

<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>
L/Cpl.	Brown,	Pte.	Davies, A. E.	Pte.	Johnson, W.
"	Sims,	"	Dawkins, F.	"	Jones, R. G.
"	Curtice, C. M.	"	Dempsey, D.	"	Hinton, J.
"	Hearn, T. L.	"	Dray, A.	"	Knight, F.
"	Horris, A.	"	Ellis, F. G.	"	Keats, A.
"	Hather, A. A.	"	Ewin, J. J.	"	Larsen, A. J.
"	Ross, G. H.	"	Fawcott, J. G.	"	Leary, T.
"	Inglis, G. H.	"	Floet, W. F.	"	Lee, S. C.
"	Handsome,	"	Fricker, T. H.	"	Lester, R.
"	P. G. A.	"	Feeney, W.	"	Lewin, G.
"	Betts, R. E.	"	Fox, C. H.	"	Look, C.
Pte.	Aney, R.	"	Gardner, H. P.	"	Leppard, F.
"	Aufholz, L.	"	Gibbard, F. D.	"	Lewis, G.
"	Ballard, A. J.	"	Goddard, A. H.	"	Lucroft, W. T.
"	Barker, J.	"	Goodger, S.	"	Ledwidge, J.
"	Baugham, J. T.	"	Green, A. R.	"	McGlynn, J.
"	Anderson, G. R.	"	Griffen, F. T.	"	Malin, A. G.
"	Balls, V. G.	"	Guard, E. G.	"	Marks, J.
"	Baynton, H.	"	Gordon, E. H.	"	Mead, A. J.
"	Boeney, A. L.	"	Gammon, H.	"	Mead, E. E.
"	Bennett, G.	"	Gue, C.	"	Melchior Hansen, A.
"	Barrett, F. C.	"	Green, C.	"	R.
"	Bill, H.	"	Hallowes, G.	"	Miller, H.
"	Blackton, E.	"	Harries, G.	"	Munk, C. J.
"	Bland, W.	"	Harrison, J.	"	Maile, N.
"	Boddy, F. P.	"	Hawley, F.	"	Mayhook, T. C.
"	Boddy, G.	"	Headley, G. J.	"	Haslin, A. B.
"	Bond, B. E. C.	"	Hinks, F. V.	"	May, L. J.
"	Booth, L.	"	Hill, —	"	Pegg, J.
"	Bowell, W.	"	Holmes, J.	"	Plummer, F.
"	Bradnam, W. R.	"	Harding, H. W.	"	Paches, J. O.
"	Bridges, G. H.	"	Honey, A.	"	Robinson, —
"	Brown, H.	"	Hughes, H.	"	Ridd, C.
"	Brunswick, F. G.	"	Hopkins, A. N.	"	Rose, T.
"	Byard, O. H.	"	Hemming, G. H. P.	"	Ruchbrook, A. L.
"	Cameron, A. E.	"	Horn, W. E.	"	Sadd, J. L.
"	Campbell, C. M.	"	Hughes, H.	"	Savage, H.
"	Chapman, F. S.	"	Howard, B. W.	"	Sayer, H.
"	Childs, A. E.	"	Humphries, W. H.	"	Shields, T. J.
"	Clark, F. C.	"	Huggett, W.	"	Smith, H. G.
"	Clark, A. E.	"	Hull, C.	"	Smith, S. H.
"	Clark, S. J.	"	Jagge, G. E.	"	Smoker, E.
"	Conboy, T.	"	Jagge, J. W.	"	Sommer, R. F.
"	Connolly, C. M.	"	James, R. F.	"	Spark, A.
"	Cook, C. H.	"	Jackson, L. G.	"	Squirell, H. J.
"	Crook, J. H.	"	Jarrard, S. P.	"	Stack, J. F.
"	Coope, T.	"	Jervis, R.	"	Stay, F. G.
"	Cullen, F. S.	"	Johns, A. G.	"	Steadman, F.

ROLL OF OFFICERS, N.C.O.'s AND MEN 309

<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>
Pte.	Steeple, W. H.	Pte.	Webster, S. B.	Pte.	Wright, H.
"	Sweeney, W.	"	Weir, R. D.	"	Young, H. R.
"	Symonds, A. J.	"	Wellbourne, P.	"	Young, T. R.
"	Scudd, C.	"	Whiteley, P.	"	Young, T. H. E.
"	Taylor, J. H.	"	Whittington, A. L.	"	Young, A. S.
"	Tillbrook, A. A.	"	Wichett, G.	"	Young, J.
"	Thomas, W. A.	"	Willcox, P.	"	Zeeman, H. I. L. F.
"	Townsend, S.	"	Wilkin, F. G.	"	Helmsley, H.
"	Trotman, B. W.	"	Wilkinson, E. C.	"	Howard, S. R.
"	Reeve, S. W.	"	Williams, P.	"	Perrian, A. W.
"	Ward, W. J.	"	Witham, S.	"	Lucas, H.
"	Warkin, F.	"	Witherick, L.	"	Lowrey, D.
"	Weatherley, O. F.	"	Wood, H.	"	Gardner, H. S.
"	Webb, G. J.	"	Wood, W. M.	"	Millward, A. M.
"	Webber, A. H.	"	Wright, F. H.	"	Webster, —

'D' COMPANY

C.S.M.	Douglas, W.	L/Cpl.	Robertson, B.D.	Pte.	Barker, J.
C.Q.M.S.	Lovell, C. S. J.	"	Clark, A. S.	"	Butler, P. M.
Sergt.	Adams, H. W.	"	Lownds, G. H.	"	Bristowe, P. N.
"	Heard, W.	"	Louch, H. H.	"	Brunette, W.
"	Aivron, S. N.	"	Saich, J.	"	Bateson, C.
"	Wright, J.	"	Poulter, J.	"	Baker, —
"	Walls, T. C.	"	Angell, G.	"	Boxell, P. J.
"	Dupres, L. C.	"	Allen, H. E.	"	Boan, A. H.
"	Nicholls, E. R.	"	Atkins, A. D.	"	Buswell, A. H.
"	Norris, C. N.	"	Baines, A. E.	"	Barrow, H. C.
L/Sergt.	Wright, V. V.	"	Baines, R. L.	"	Brissenden, A. H.
"	Arkell, T. R.	"	Farmer, J. H.	"	Braid, R. A.
Cpl.	Davies, C.	"	Grimes, F.	"	Brown, C. C.
"	Cutler, R.	"	Hadfield, R. L.	"	Collings, A. J.
"	Bird, J.	"	Roberts, C. L.	"	Collings, F. C.
"	Phelps, R. R.	"	Whitmore, H.	"	Champ, T. A.
"	Martingell, H.	"	W.	"	Cadman, J. J.
"	G.	Pte.	Adams, F. H.	"	Coleby, H. C.
"	Tamplin, L.	"	Arthurs, P.	"	Coppock, A.
"	Pursey, E. E.	"	Allen, A.	"	Cox, —
L/Cpl.	Forsdick, C. N.	"	Avis, T. G. L.	"	Cox, C. S.
"	Wood, L. J.	"	Ashton, H. E.	"	Clark, P. S.
"	Windsor, C.	"	Burn, W.	"	Clarke, H. P.
"	Edwards, H. L.	"	Burrage, R. F.	"	Clarkson, A. G.
"	Railton, J.	"	Byard, A.	"	Clerihew, G.
"	Orton, E.	"	Brown, A. E.	"	Cornford, A. H.
"	Licence, N. G.	"	Branscombe, E.	"	Curtis, E. G.
"	Wooblerley, C.	"	Brittain, E.	"	Crocker, A.
"	Hatwell, W. G.	"	Brittain, A.	"	Campbell, A.
"	Strouse, J.	"	Bowman, A. T.	"	Cory, F. W.
"	Birdekin, E.	"	Brook, C.	"	Dadd, W. J.

310 THE 17TH (S.) BATTALION ROYAL FUSILIERS

<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>
Pte.	Drage, F.	Pte.	Mason, H. T.	Pte.	Swaby, S. J.
"	Darby, R.	"	Monk, A.	"	Spindler, F. V.
"	Duplock, L. R.	"	Mitchell, N.	"	Stoddard, E.
"	Davies, C.	"	Mitchell, W.	"	Starnes, A. E.
"	Edwards, P. J.	"	Melton, J. B.	"	Tolling, F. L.
"	England, W. C.	"	Mansfield, F.	"	Town, C. H.
"	Fairhurst, L. G. T.	"	Maxwell, R.	"	Tomlin, H.
"	Forrest, A.	"	Nicol, R. B.	"	Thurston, H. G.
"	Fry, L.	"	Nash, A. E.	"	Tedder, R.
"	Frost, G.	"	Newbury, R.	"	Thomson, R. A.
"	Godfrey, F. W.	"	Owen, G.	"	Taylot, T. L.
"	Gooderham, J.	"	Oakley, J.	"	Vardy, W.
"	Gilby, R. R.	"	Puddick, J. A.	"	Westbrook, B. A. V.
"	Grimes, A. E.	"	Osterroth, F.	"	Wright, A.
"	Garraway, C.	"	Puddick, H. J.	"	Wright, S. H.
"	Gray, S.	"	Podger, G.	"	Wright, J. A.
"	Gragon, J. E.	"	Pooler, G.	"	Wright, E. W.
"	Grandy, P. C.	"	Padmore, A. E.	"	Todd, C. H.
"	Hope, P. A.	"	Parkin, H. C.	"	Wakerell, W. G.
"	Hadley, P.	"	Philpot, C.	"	Wakerell, J. G.
"	Hunt, A. J.	"	Pittaway, T.	"	Wall, W.
"	Hicks, J. R.	"	Potter, S. H.	"	Watts, F.
"	Haine, R. N.	"	Petter, S.	"	Wobb, G.
"	Hancock, F. W.	"	Phillips, T. H.	"	Willetta, A.
"	Hart, H. N.	"	Rumble, E.	"	Williamson, F.
"	Hawker, G. S.	"	Rennie, A.	"	Woollard, J. R.
"	Herring, T. E.	"	Read, P.	"	Waskett, W. P.
"	Harvey, E. W.	"	Sammons, J. L.	"	Wellweber, O. E.
"	Huggett, P. A.	"	Rolls, E. D.	"	Wyatt, C.
"	Huxter, P.	"	Richardson, A. T.	"	Wyatt, E.
"	Hearne, H. N.	"	Rawlings, S.	"	Woodhams, E. P.
"	Hearne, E. B.	"	Smith, R. F.	"	Woodhams, W. S.
"	Jesty, L. T.	"	Smith, F. R.	"	Wary, W. R.
"	Jeff, A.	"	Smith, W.	"	Wolstenholme, L.
"	Kemp, J. G.	"	Slade, J.	"	Walsh, J.
"	Lewington, A.	"	Simpson, A. E.	"	Willshaw, W.
"	Lancaster, H. P.	"	Shaw, J. E.	"	Webb, G. J.
"	Luke, C. E.	"	Smedley, E.	"	Wells, G. E.
"	Murrell, G.	"	Spencer, C. T.	"	Wells, W. A.
"	Mader, J.	"	Sharland, J. D.	"	Williams, A.
"	Merryweather, A. E.	"	Shepard, H. G.	"	Witherden, G.
"	Morford, H. J.	"	Siddell, F. J.	"	Wilkinson, B. V.
"	Marshall, L. C.	"	Swaby, H. P.	"	Harrison, W. F.
"	Murphy, T. C.				

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